WINDOWS OPENED IN HEAVEN

BY

I. S. RANKIN

1899

PRESENTED

TO

Nellie McGill

PUPIL OF

Metropolitan

Sabbath School,

THROUGH THE

UPPER CANADA TRACT SOCIETY,

AS TRUSTEE OF THE LATE

JESSE KETCHUM, Esq.

Formerly a Vice-President of the above Society.

Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth.
—Ec. xii. 1.

The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.
—Ps cxi. 10.

METROPOLITAN
METHODIST
SUNDAY SCHOOL.

PRESENTED TO

Nellie McGill

FOR

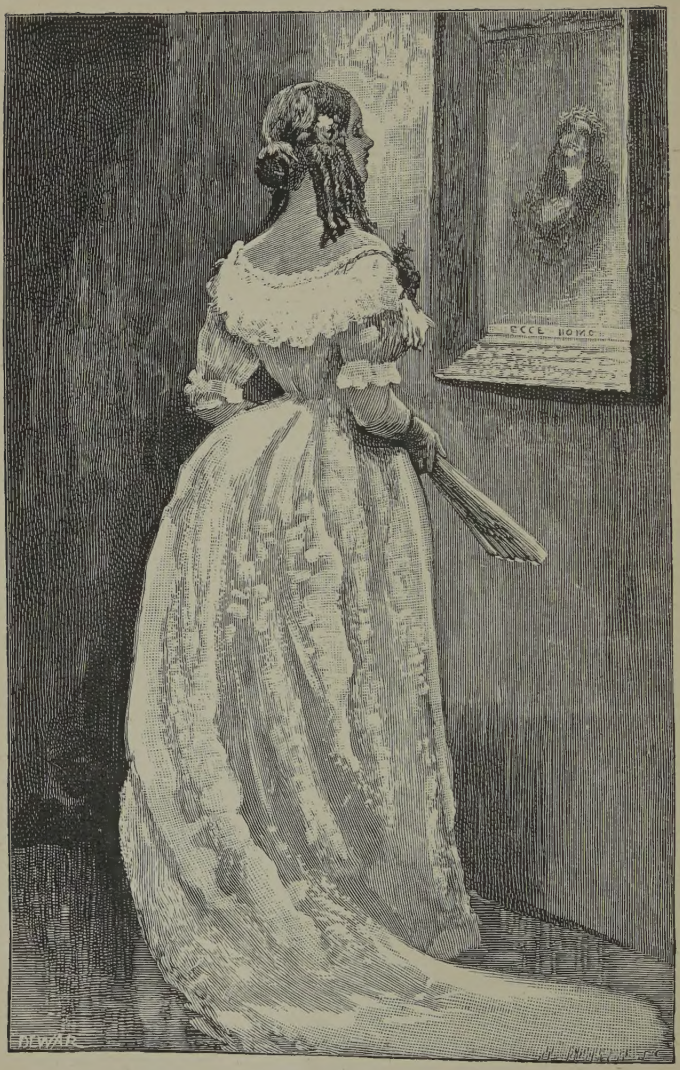
Recitation of Scripture

For Year ending January

1900.

A. H. Carrick

Superintendent.



Frontispiece.] THE PICTURE IN THE BALL-ROOM. (*See page* 18.)

WINDOWS OPENED IN HEAVEN.

A NARRATIVE OF REAL LIFE.

BY

I. S. RANKIN,

AUTHOR OF

"MARJORIE'S PROBATION" AND "CHAPTERS FROM A LIFE STORY."

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WINDOWS OPENED IN HEAVEN.

CHAPTER I.

LIGHT AT EVENTIDE.

"Oh, eyes that are weary, and hearts that are sore,
Look off unto Jesus, and sorrow no more;
The light of His countenance shineth so bright,
That on earth, as in heaven, there need be no night."

From "Hymns for the Church on Earth."

IT was a Saturday in March. All day a dense fog had hung over London, making still more dreary than usual the aspect of the poor streets and squalid courts which abound in the great city. Anything more dismal than the appearance of the streets could hardly be conceived, as a young lady, barely past girlhood, passed quickly through Gray's Inn Lane. It was late in the afternoon, and the fog was giving place to driving rain mingled with hail. An icy wind howled around,

penetrating the warmest garments, and Ida Spencer shivered, and drew her cloak more closely around her as she pressed onwards. It was a sort of day that few would care to brave, unless driven by urgent necessity, to expose themselves to the inclement weather; and the few people she met gazed almost wonderingly at the slight, girlish form, which at times staggered as she faced the stormy blast. But Ida Spencer was barely conscious of the discomforts to which she was exposed; her mind was pre-occupied and her heart very full, for her errand was to bear words of hope and cheer to a sufferer whose feet were on the very brink of that river which, sooner or later, we all must cross.

She had received a hasty summons from the wife of a man whom she had of late frequently visited. He was in the last stage of consumption, and from the wording of the message sent, she almost doubted whether she should find the sick man alive, so her one object was to reach her destination as quickly as possible, and she hurried along noticing nothing.

They who can look back fifty years may remember a narrow opening opposite Gray's Inn Gates, leading from Baldwin's Gardens. On the right-hand side of this passage there was a huckster's shop which, owing to the narrowness of the passage, was always almost dark. For this house Miss Spencer was bound; and when she reached the opening she noticed some women standing near the door of the house, regardless of the rain. They made way for her as she drew near, and one of them said to her—

"I'se glad you're come, miss. He's agoin' fast, poor dear, and he keeps askin' for you, he does."

"Thank you, Mrs. Jones," Miss Spencer said, as the woman stood back to let her pass into the house. "Is Mrs. Dalton upstairs?"

"Yes, miss. She wanted to be alone with her man for a bit, so I came away. Not that she's much use to do anything, poor soul, for she's takin' on terrible, surelie. I tell her it ain't no manner o' use her frettin'; it won't keep her man here. We must all go when our time comes; and Tom Dalton's got nought to be afear'd on; he've been a good livin' man."

"He has nothing to fear, certainly, Mrs. Jones; not because of his goodness, but because his sins are forgiven for Christ's sake. But I must not stay to talk now if I am wanted. I suppose I may go up?"

So saying Miss Spencer entered the house, and passed quietly up the dark staircase to the sick man's room. It was very small, close, and scantily furnished; but everything was delicately clean, from the boards of the floor to the sheets on the bed, all giving evidence to the tender care bestowed upon the invalid, who lay in the bed at one side of the room. He was fearfully emaciated, the face being literally skin and bone, and its ghastly pallor being made more conspicuous by the scarlet flush on the hollow cheeks. The eyes were sunken, but shone with a calm light that told of a mind at peace. He feebly held out his hand, and said as his visitor took it in her own—

"Thank you, miss, for coming so soon. I wanted

to see you once more to tell you that the darkness is gone."

"I knew it would go, Dalton," Miss Spencer replied. "Satan took advantage of your weakness to harass you with doubts. But our God is mightier than Satan, and He has heard my prayers that He would lighten the darkness. The Sun of Righteousness has arisen on your soul with healing in His wings, has He not?"

"Yes, miss. How good He is! I have no fear at all now, though I know that death is very near. All is peace."

"'Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for Thou art with me; Thy rod and Thy staff they comfort me.' Jesus is with you now, Dalton. You remember His promise —'I will come again, and receive you unto Myself.'"

"Yes, miss; and, blessed be His name, I *feel* that He is near. After you went yesterday I kep' a thinkin' of the words you read to me, and the light came quite sudden like. I thought if Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, even the chief, that must mean me. And He said Himself that He would not cast out any who came to Him. So I said to Him, 'Dear Lord Jesus, I am a great sinner, but I believe Thy promise that Thou wilt not cast me out.' Then I almost heard Him say, 'Thy sins be forgiven thee; go in peace.' And while I was thinkin' of His wonderful great love in dying on the cross for me I forgot everything else, and the darkness was gone."

"That was because you left off thinking of yourself,

and thought only of Jesus. That's the way to get peace, Dalton. The name of Jesus is like ointment poured forth, healing our sin-sick souls, and driving away our fears. You will soon see His face now."

A look of joy brightened the dying face.

"Ay, miss. Isn't it wonderful to think of that such as I should be goin' to heaven to see my Saviour face to face? Will you read me the verses about them as have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb? Parson, he read them when he was here this mornin', but I'd like to hear them once more."

Miss Spencer took up a Bible that lay on the bed, and opened it at Revelation vii. From outside came the distant roar of traffic and sounds of angry voices raised in dispute, mingled with the howling of the wind and the dashing of hail against the window-panes. But within the room all was still, the only sound being the gentle voice of Ida Spencer as she read those beautiful words, "These are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. Therefore are they before the throne of God, and serve Him day and night in His temple: and He that sitteth on the throne shall dwell among them. They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more. . . . For the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters: and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes."

The sufferer's face grew radiant as he listened. By

the bedside knelt his wife, her hand closely clasped in her husband's grasp. His other hand rested lovingly on her bowed head. As Miss Spencer's voice ceased a sob of anguish burst from the poor wife's breast, and a wailing cry.

"Oh, Tom, my Tom, how can I live without you? What shall I do when you are gone?"

"God will care for you, my Jennie. He will never leave you. If He gave His Son to die for you, be sure He will not let you want."

"'Leave thy fatherless children, I will preserve them alive; and let thy widows trust in Me,'" quoted Ida Spencer in a soft voice.

"Listen, Jennie—there's a blessed promise for us both. It's hard to leave you to struggle alone, love. You've been a good wife to me. But it's but for a little while, Jennie, my woman. We shall soon meet again."

The dying man spoke brokenly, with painful gasps between the words, and it became evident that he was sinking fast.

The wife sobbed on in anguish so great that she seemed unable to receive comfort. Ah! Jennie Dalton had a grief gnawing at her heart besides the woe of approaching widowhood—a sorrow of which her husband knew nothing, and which nothing but the blood of Christ applied could heal. This grief was the consciousness that she had been unfaithful to the Lord who bought her, and was systematically deceiving her husband.

Ida Spencer was about to pray, at the sick man's

request, when rapid footsteps were heard on the stairs, and in a moment the clergyman, Mr. Barton, stood on the threshold, saying, "Peace be to this house, and to all that dwell in it." Then he said, "Let us pray," and, kneeling down, commended the soul of the dying man to God. The prayer was just over when a violent fit of coughing racked the sufferer's feeble frame, and it was evident that the end was very near.

Choking down her sobs, the poor wife tenderly supported her husband. When the cough was stilled she laid him gently back upon his pillows, and wiped the death-dews from his pale brow. There were a few gasping struggles for breath, one shuddering sigh, and then the ransomed spirit soared to the presence of Him who had redeemed it.

"'Absent from the body, present with the Lord.' 'So He giveth His beloved sleep,'" said Mr. Barton, as he closed the eyes of the dead man.

When Mrs. Dalton saw that all was over her grief broke out so violently that Ida was frightened. She had just looked on death for the first time, and was feeling how solemn a thing it is, even for the believer. She was thankful, therefore, that the clergyman's presence made it unnecessary for her to speak, for she felt unable to do so. With silent sympathy she tried to soothe the grief of the poor widow, who sobbed in bitter anguish that she "should never see her Tom again, for she had sinned past forgiveness."

Presently Mr. Barton's remark that he wished to speak a few words to the neighbours who crowded in at the sound of her cries made her try to control

herself; and when she grew calmer the clergyman spoke of death as the penalty of sin, and told how, through the death of Christ, the foe was for the believer a vanquished foe, in that He had removed the sting of death, having "put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself."

As soon as Ida Spencer could slip away she turned her steps homewards. As she hurried through the filthy courts, strewed with refuse of all sorts, and thronged with disreputable people of both sexes, cursing, swearing, singing ribald songs, or fighting, her thoughts went back to the death-bed scene so lately witnessed. "How glorious must be the awakening to him who had fallen asleep amid such surroundings, to awake in the temple of the living God!" she mused; and some lines she had lately read recurred to her mind—

> "O change! O wondrous change!
> Burst are the prison bars.
> One moment here, so low, so agonized, and now
> Beyond the stars."

Her heart throbbed with pity for the degraded creatures around her, and she breathed a prayer that they might be brought out of their state of sin and misery into the glorious liberty of the children of God. She had not been very long at her work in this part of London—one of the worst localities of the vast city—and she had never before been out so late; and as now and again a drunken woman stumbled up against her, or loud shouts and blasphemous words fell upon her ear, she shrank with fear. The sights

and sounds sickened her; it seemed, indeed, as if Satan's seat were there. "But," she said to herself, "nothing is too hard for the Lord. These poor creatures are not, in reality, any further from the kingdom of God than I was. They, also, may be brought to the feet of Jesus. So I will work on in faith and prayer, glad to be allowed to work for God."

When she got home she found her sister and the lady who lived with them anxiously looking out for her, as it was quite dusk.

While they took tea together, Ida told of Dalton's death, also of the sad sights and sounds which she had encountered on her way home. And the two sisters agreed that, with God's help, they would give themselves more earnestly than ever yet to the work of seeking out the lost, and carrying to them the good tidings of salvation.

CHAPTER II.

"WHAT HAST THOU DONE FOR ME?"

"I gave My life for thee,
My precious blood I shed,
That thou mightest ransomed be,
And quickened from the dead.
I gave My life for thee,
What hast thou done for Me?"

F. R. HAVERGAL.

DA and Margaret Spencer were orphans. They had a small independence, and lived with a widow lady, Mrs. Winterton, who had been a friend of their mother's, and did her best to supply that mother's place to the two girls whom she loved so truly.

My story opens in the spring of the year in which the cholera epidemic appeared in London. A day of fasting and humiliation had been set apart, which was observed with the greatest reverence. Even the most careless had appeared to be, for the time, aroused

to the realization that there is a God that judgeth in the earth; and in many instances the impression made proved to be a lasting one. On the appointed day solemn services were held throughout the kingdom. God's people, of all denominations, joined in acknowledging that the nation deserved His righteous judgments, and besought that in the midst of wrath He would remember mercy and stay His chastening hand.

Mrs. Winterton and her young friends attended St. John's, Bedford Row—a sanctuary hallowed by memories of Cecil, Daniel Wilson, and other faithful pastors. At the close of the sermon preached on the evening of the fast-day—a sermon which had caused deep searchings of heart and earnest purpose of self-dedication among the congregation—a special appeal was made on behalf of the spiritual destitution of the surrounding district, urging that some grand effort should be made among the lost sheep dwelling in the courts and alleys, which were densely populated with a most depraved set of inhabitants. Volunteers for this mission were invited to present themselves in the committee-room after the service, in order that their names might be enrolled as workers. Many responded to the appeal, and had districts assigned to them, and this movement proved to be the starting-point of a great awakening in those parts. Much valuable machinery already existed; but hitherto there had been a want of combined, sustained effort, such as was then set on foot.

Ida and Margaret Spencer were among the volunteers, and they entered heart and soul into the work,

which they found most profitable and interesting. Ida, especially, experienced the fulfilment of the promise, "He that watereth others shall be watered also himself." In pointing others to the Saviour, she herself obtained clearer views of His love and beauty, and renewed strength to follow closely in His footsteps.

When first Ida Spencer set out to run the Christian race, she had a sort of idea that it would be possible to "make the best of both worlds." She had a bright, buoyant nature, a warm heart, which made her very popular, and she was calculated to shine in society, thoroughly enjoying its amusements. These, she told herself, she need not relinquish if she did not allow them in any way to interfere with "religious duties," or to encroach on the periods which she set apart for prayer and reading her Bible.

For a time she was satisfied with the course she had taken; but a change came. She went one evening to a ball given at a friend's house. In the course of the evening her attention became arrested by a very beautiful engraving of "Christ crowned with thorns," with the inscription, "Ecce Homo." She felt uncomfortable, and said testily to herself that such a picture was altogether out of place in a scene of gaiety, and should have been removed. The remembrance of the cause of the death and passion of Christ constantly recurred to her mind throughout the evening, and the thought occurred to her that, as she looked for salvation through that death and passion, she could not consistently take part in scenes where the mere representation of the suffering Saviour seemed out of place.

From that time she determined to renounce all worldly amusements, and to give herself up wholly to Him who had bought her with the price of His own blood.

Having no close family ties, the two young girls were able to devote themselves to the work for which they had volunteered. They were well fitted for it; for, in addition to earnest piety, they had plenty of good sense, very sympathetic natures, and *tact*. This latter quality—the outcome of a kindly consideration for the feelings of others—is especially valuable to those who visit among their poorer neighbours. Without it none can make their visits acceptable, and no decided good can be accomplished.

Ida was extremely popular, and soon it became evident that her influence for good was very great. She showed herself interested in the worldly concerns of those she visited, and gave them such hearty sympathy in their many trials, that she gained a hold upon their affections, and thus had many an opportunity of speaking a word in season. She never met with rudeness. Even the roughest men and boys seemed to be careful in her presence not to use language which would wound her delicacy, so that she could fearlessly go in and out among the most degraded, bearing the good tidings of salvation for the chief of sinners.

The various districts had needed to be closely inspected before being assigned to female visitors, for there were many houses which no woman could enter. These were visited by a number of Christian gentle-

men, who agreed to undertake the charge, so that all might hear the message of pardon and peace.

The whole organization of the system was beyond all praise. The bodies as well as the souls of the poor creatures were cared for. There was food for the hungry, medicine for the sick, work for those who were able to work. A large sum of money had been collected on the fast-day, which was judiciously apportioned for the purchase of necessaries, whether food, firing, or clothing, which were dispensed to the holders of tickets given by the district visitors to those in need.

Soon after the organization of this system, cholera made its appearance in the district attached to St. John's, Bedford Row. Some severe cases resulted in speedy death; but the disease did not rage with the virulence displayed in some parts of London. Prayer for God's sparing mercy had been accompanied by the active use of means to avert the danger, and much good had resulted from the sanitary precautions carried out by the visitors. Attention to cleanliness, warm clothing, and better food, had, in measure, fortified the bodies of the poor creatures, and prepared them to resist disease.

Still the dreaded foe was abroad. "The Cholera Chair," conveying patients to the hospitals, was seen at its work from time to time, striking terror into the hearts of the dwellers in the court or street where it made its appearance, for none knew who might be the next victim. A gloom brooded over those who knew themselves to be unprepared to meet their God, but

yet had consciences sufficiently alive to realize their danger. Among those who had devoted themselves to their Christ-like work peace reigned. While fully alive to their danger—aware that, at any moment, an agonizing disease might seize upon them—they were content, knowing themselves to be in a loving Father's hand. They took all due precautions, and then went fearlessly wherever duty called, their motto being, "I must work the works of Him that calleth me while it is day."

In addition to house to house visitation, Scripture readings were held in different rooms of some of the larger houses where lived several families. Those who were willing offered the use of a room for the purpose, and all were invited to attend. By these means the gospel message was widely scattered abroad, and the seed sown in faith and watered by prayer bore fruit to everlasting life. Many a brand was plucked from the burning in those days. Many who had been given to the service of the god of this world became good soldiers of the cross, and there was joy in the presence of the angels of God over many a repentant sinner.

In after years, Ida Spencer looked back to that spring as a time of great spiritual refreshing. Her district included some courts opening into Baldwin's Gardens, where were large schools in which she taught on Sunday. Her class was large, for she was a popular and a successful teacher. She showed so much interest in her scholars, and visited them so regularly at home, that the parents were encouraged

to see that their children were constant in their attendance.

It was through her class that she made acquaintance with the Daltons, who, as I have already said, kept a little shop in a passage leading out of Baldwin's Gardens. In this shop were a variety of articles — candles, wood, ropes of onions, red herrings, etc. In the window were glass bottles containing "lollipops" of various kinds, and hardbake, of which comestible Mrs. Dalton was an adept manufacturer. This hardbake became a bone of contention between the Sunday school children and their teachers. Stores of it were brought to school to be devoured, by way of refreshment during the lesson, and Ida found out that the dainty was procured from Mrs. Dalton. In consequence of this information she decided to call on the said Mrs. Dalton, and see if she could persuade her to give up the practice of selling on Sunday. She took an early opportunity of carrying out her intention; with what success I will tell in another chapter.

CHAPTER III.

WEIGHED IN THE BALANCE AND FOUND WANTING.

"O Lord, how happy should we be
If we could cast our care on Thee,
If we from self could rest;
And feel at heart that One above,
In perfect wisdom, perfect love,
Is working for the best."

ANSTICE.

FROM the locality in which Mrs. Dalton lived, Miss Spencer expected to see a dirty, untidy shop, and a slatternly mistress. She was therefore not a little surprised when, on entering the shop, she saw a pleasant looking, youngish woman behind the counter. She wore a clean print gown and apron, and neat white cap, and it was in a quiet, respectful tone that she asked her visitor's business.

"I came to ask you to shut up your shop on Sunday," said Ida, going straight to the point. "My little scholars cannot resist your nice hardbake, and are always getting into trouble about it."

"I am sorry for that, miss, I'm sure. Perhaps if

it's to talk you're come you would step inside. My man's ill a-bed, so there's no one inside." As she spoke she held open the door of a tiny room behind the shop.

Ida passed in, and Mrs. Dalton drew forward a chair, which she dusted before offering it to her visitor, a precaution which seemed unnecessary, for not a speck of dust was visible. Indeed, the whole room was tidy, and had a general aspect of comfort for which Miss Spencer was not prepared. There was a bright fire in the little grate, the hearth was swept up, and a well polished tin kettle was singing on the hob; the floor and ceiling were clean, the window-panes bright, and some cheap, pretty pictures hung on the walls. There were healthy plants in pots on the window-sill, and a little child sat on the rug playing with a headless doll, and humming a little song to itself meanwhile.

Miss Spencer accepted the proffered chair, and could not help remarking how nice the room looked Mrs. Dalton seemed pleased.

"You see, miss, me and my man was always brought up in the country, and we can't abear dirt. But it ain't easy to keep clean here. I never thought to come to such a place as this."

"I am sure it must be very difficult to keep clean. I cannot think how you manage to have everything so comfortable."

Just then came the sound of a knock on the floor above them. Mrs. Dalton started up, and said—

"That's my man knocking. Will you excuse me, miss, if I go to see what he wants?"

"Oh, pray go," said the visitor, as the sound of a hollow cough came from above.

While left alone, Miss Spencer made friends with the little girl—by no means a difficult matter, for the child was inclined to be sociable. When the mother returned she found her little Jessie sitting upon the young lady's lap, playing with some little trinkets which hung from her watch-chain. The mother's face brightened, and her heart was won.

Miss Spencer asked a few questions about the husband's illness, and then reverted to the object of her visit; but without much success.

"I know that it is wrong to sell on Sunday, miss, and breaking God's commandment," said the woman humbly.

"And it is not only that," said the young lady. "Besides doing wrong yourself, you lead others into sin. Don't you see that?"

"There's plenty other shops open a Sunday, miss. If people didn't come to my shop, they would buy somewhere else."

"But that you have nothing to do with, Mrs. Dalton. It is only our own actions for which we are responsible and shall have to give an account to God."

"I never *did* think to come to sell a Sundays, miss. My man, he stood out against it when first we came here, though the neighbours was fine and angry."

"Then how is it that he allows it now?"

"Oh, miss, he doesn't know nothing about it, and I wouldn't like him to know neither. You see, this is

how it was. Doctor said as how he must have better food, beef-tea and the like, so I took to selling o' Sundays to get it. I *couldn't* see him want, and him so bad with his cough. I don't think but what the Almighty will make allowances for me. He knows why I did it, and how sore pressed I was."

"But you must not forget that God is a holy and a just God, and sin will not be allowed to go unpunished. You say God knows your trouble, and so He does, and He has promised never to fail them who put their trust in Him. If only you would trust Him, He would be sure to help you."

"I used to think I did trust Him, miss, and I think I could for myself. But you don't know what it is to see a sick husband and little children wanting for food," and the poor woman burst into tears.

"It must be most dreadful, and you were sorely tempted. But if only you would cast your care on God, He would help you to do the right thing, and you would be so much happier. Surely it must make you wretched to feel that you are deceiving your good husband."

"Ay, you're right, miss; and it's an unhappy woman I am this day. Sometimes my man talks to me of how good the Lord has been to us in sending us more customers—for a many deals with me now that didn't before, and I sell more on Sunday mornings than other days. And all the time he talks so beautiful about trusting the Lord I know what I'm doing, and then my heart's like to burst, that it is. But then I *can't* bear to see him want."

Much more passed on the subject, both then and on other occasions; but the erring woman always came back to the same point, that she could not run any risk of being unable to provide her sick husband with the comforts he required, and that if she closed her shop on Sunday her customers would forsake her.

Once, after one of their conversations, Miss Spencer thought that she would promise to make up to the poor woman anything she lost by giving up Sunday trading, if she would do it. But her better judgment told her that she should do no real good that way; that Mrs. Dalton would find no blessing in the action unless it was done for right's sake; and she determined to leave the matter for the present, praying that God would give the poor woman grace to trust Him.

On the occasion of her first visit, Miss Spencer had promised to call again soon, and, a few days later, she once more turned her steps towards the little shop. She found Mrs. Dalton busy at the wash-tub, but the good woman welcomed her with a smile, and asked her to see her husband. Before leading the way upstairs, she said, with rather a confused air—

"If I might make so bold, miss, I should be much obliged if you will not say anything to my man about my selling o' Sundays. It would make him grieve, and he do suffer so."

"I will not speak of it," was the answer. "But, oh, Mrs. Dalton, I wish you would do what is right, and trust God with the result! I have thought so much about you, and there is a passage of Scripture I want to show you."

She opened a little Bible which she carried, and read, "Will a man rob God? Yet ye have robbed Me."

"Don't you see that *you* are robbing God of His own day by selling on Sunday, Mrs. Dalton?"

The poor woman did not answer, but she looked thoughtful, so her visitor continued reading. "Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be meat in Mine house, and prove me now herewith, saith the Lord of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it" (Mal. iii. 8–10).

Mrs. Dalton appeared to be very much struck with the passage, which, she said, she had never noticed; and she asked Mrs. Spencer to mark the passage in a Bible which she took from a little book-case. When that was done she conducted the visitor to her husband's room, and introduced her to him with the words, "Here is the young lady come to see you, Tom." She then returned to her wash-tub.

Miss Spencer had seen enough of sickness to know that the invalid was seriously ill, and asked—

"Do you think you are well enough to see a stranger? Will it not tire you to talk to me?"

"Oh no, miss, thank you kindly. It does me good to speak to them as loves my Saviour; and you are one of them, I take it."

"Yes," said Ida simply. "Jesus has done so much for me that I must love Him. I fear you are very ill," she continued kindly.

"Yes, miss, I'm mortal bad. My strength seems all gone. I just lie here waiting for my call."

"You are not afraid of death, then?"

"Oh no, miss; thank the Lord for that. You see, since I knew that all my sins were laid upon Jesus when He died upon the cross, I've had no fear of death. But sometimes when I think of my Jennie and the little ones, I feel sore afraid what will come to them with never a man to take care of them. It's weary work for a woman alone, miss."

"You must trust them to Him to whom you have trusted your soul, Dalton."

"Yes, miss, that's what I try to do. But sometimes I get down-hearted like. Times have been terrible hard since I took ill. It's been very hard for my Jennie. She works all day, and gets such bad nights along o' me. But she never complains, bless her! She's been a good wife to me; and we've never had a mis-word between us since we were married. You see, miss, we both serves the same Master—and a good Master He's been to us—so we've pulled the same way. It must be bad, surelie, when husband and wife goes different roads."

A fit of coughing forced the sick man to cease speaking, and Miss Spencer offered to read to him. His face brightened as he said—

"Oh, thank you, miss! That will be a treat. I can't read much to myself now, and I never was a good scholar at any time."

As the visitor read portion after portion of Scripture she quite enjoyed the remarks made thereon by the

sick man, and she thought as she listened, "Who teacheth like God? I shall learn much from this suffering saint."

This visit was the first of many quiet, happy hours spent by the bedside of the dying man. Sometimes, when weary and discouraged after visiting in her district, Ida went joyfully to that dark little bedroom, which came to be to her as the "gate of heaven." There she always found refreshment. The sick man's faith was so simple, and withal so strong, that she always felt encouraged after a talk with him. He grew in grace so rapidly that it was evident he was being ripened for glory.

He lingered about two months after Miss Spencer first saw him. His sufferings were very great, specially towards the end, when bed-sores caused him great agony; but his patience was wonderful, and no murmur ever came from his lips. The wife nursed him with the greatest tenderness and devotion, never seeming to think of herself; and when the end came she was utterly broken down.

Many a talk did Miss Spencer have with her about her Sunday trading. More than once she hoped that her point was gained; but, when Sunday came round again, the only partially closed shutters told their own tale, and the young visitor grieved, feeling how much sorrow the erring woman was heaping up for herself by persisting in a course which she knew to be wrong.

CHAPTER IV.

RETROSPECTIVE.

"When through the deep waters I call thee to go,
The rivers of grief shall not thee overflow,
For I will be with thee in trouble to bless,
And sanctify to thee the deepest distress.

"When through fiery trials thy pathway shall lie,
My grace all-sufficient shall be thy supply;
The flame shall not hurt thee; I only design
Thy dross to consume, and thy gold to refine."

KEITH.

TOM DALTON and his wife had been friends from childhood, and were both brought up in a country village. Tom's father died when he was a few days old, and his mother found her chief comfort in training her child, hoping that he would grow up such a man as his father had been. And she was not disappointed. While he was still a lad the light from on high shone into his soul, and he set out to run the race set before him, looking unto Jesus. He was a bricklayer by

trade, and work being scarce in his native village, when he was twenty-one he went up to London, accompanied by his mother, and he quickly found employment, being a good workman. They had been three years in London, when Tom fell in with Jennie Matthews, who was living as kitchenmaid in a family who spent part of each year in town. He invited her to visit his mother; the renewed acquaintance ripened into mutual love, and the young couple were married. Jennie appeared to be a religious girl, and the little household was conducted as a Christian home should be.

But, as Jennie Dalton said herself in after years, her religion at that time was of the *head*, not of the *heart;* so, when strong temptation assailed her, she put the creature before the Creator, and fell into sin.

At the time Tom Dalton thought of marriage he was receiving good wages, and was employed permanently by a firm who were building largely out Clapham way. So a little cottage was found near Tom's work, and there the young people began housekeeping. Mrs. Dalton, Tom's mother, joined them, and she and Jennie took in washing.

All went well until the third child was a few weeks old, then trouble came. The winter was a very hard one. For weeks together the ground was covered with snow, and iron-bound with frost. One very severe day old Mrs. Dalton slipped and fell while crossing the yard. She was taken up insensible, and it was found that, besides having received injuries to the head, her right thigh was broken.

She never recovered the effects of this accident, and after lingering three months in great suffering, she died, leaving both her children almost heart-broken. Jennie, who had never known her own mother, was inconsolable.

"Mother was such a blessing in the home that life will never be the same now she's gone," she said, weeping. "What shall I do without her?"

The mother's death was not the only trouble. Jennie had been so occupied nursing the sick woman that she was obliged to hire a person to help her with the washing. This woman proved to be dishonest. From time to time various articles sent to be washed were missing; and, in the end, poor Jennie lost her best customers. After that trouble seemed to pursue the Daltons wave upon wave, and Jennie changed from a bright, blooming young matron to an anxious, careworn woman. Her children came fast, and it became hard work to keep the wolf from the door. She often wondered at her husband's peaceful, calm trust through all their difficulties, for the secret of peace at all times, and under all circumstances, was a lesson she had yet to learn—where alone it can be learnt—at the foot of the cross. They only who have trusted their souls to Jesus for salvation can commit their earthly concerns to "Him who careth for us," and in so doing find rest.

The Christmas following old Mrs. Dalton's death the little cottage had to be given up, and two rooms taken in a cheap locality. There they lived for two or three years without being actually in want. But,

meantime, Tom's health was breaking, and he became conscious, day by day, that he was more unfit for the long walk which he now had to take to and from his work. At last he broke down altogether. A neglected cold ran on to inflammation of the lungs; he was laid up for weeks, and when able to work again, he found that his place was filled up. From that time he only got work "by the job." Consumption was so plainly written on his face that no master builder would engage him for a permanence, fearing to be a hand short at a busy time.

Darker and darker lowered the storm-clouds, but behind the blackest of them Tom Dalton saw the light of God's love ever shining; and the sorer the trouble, the more steadfast did his faith become, so it seemed to his wife, who was sorely overburdened herself. They drifted lower and lower, until they took up their abode in the passage opening from Baldwin's Gardens. It was a grievous trial to them to live in such a low neighbourhood, but nowhere else could they find accommodation for seven children. Then the little shop was a temptation, as they hoped it would be a means of bringing grist to the mill. And at first Mrs. Dalton thought that her shop was going to be a great success. But when it was found that the shop was closed on Sunday, the inhabitants of the passage took offence. On the first Sunday many customers came for bundles of wood, or red herrings, or onions, etc.; but all received the same answer from Tom Dalton—"We do not sell on Sunday."

Every possible course was tried to make him alter his decision, but in vain. Some stormed and swore at him; in which case he gently rebuked the swearer, while still refusing to break God's commands. Ridicule was tried. The neighbours jeered at him as "a canting Methodist," hooted after him whenever he appeared, and called him "a psalm-singing hypocrite, who curried favour with the parson by pretending to be religious." And they threatened to withdraw their custom; but all in vain. The man held on his way, appearing to care nothing for their abuse; and only his wife and the God whom he served knew how bitterly he was stung by the taunts of his neighbours.

Once, when Jennie, goaded to anger by some special ill-treatment of her husband, cried, "Oh, Tom, why do you bear it?" he replied, "My Jennie, what is that to bear for the dear Lord who died for us? Besides, nothing can be all bad which drives one to God, as this does me."

And, indeed, it seemed as if Tom Dalton lived so closely to his God as almost to have a foretaste of the joy which would be his portion when he was called to His immediate presence, so calm was his countenance, although it bore traces of weariness and pain.

When her husband became too ill to work, there came a time of sore trial and testing for Jennie Dalton. She was, as it were, "tried in the balance, and found wanting." They who have known what it is to see a loved one fading for lack of proper

nourishment, or to have to send children to school half-clad, and not half-fed, can sympathize with the trouble of this poor wife and mother. Nothing but God's grace could have upheld her in such a scathing trial; and that she did not seek with all her heart.

She had tempters all around. One and another who came to her shop, after her husband took to his bed, urged her to open on Sundays, telling her that if she did so she would soon have a thriving trade. Some one or other was always at her, and at last they gained their end. Surely these people were doing the devil's work when they set themselves to try to drive this sorely tried woman to dishonour the God whom she professed to serve.

Jennie's fall not only injured her own soul, but it did harm past telling to others, and she had to eat bitter fruit in consequence. Not daring to let her husband know how she got the money which provided him with comforts, she forbid her children to mention that the shop was open on Sunday, and so she gave them a lesson in deceit which it would be hard for them to unlearn.

As I have said, remonstrances were in vain; but Jennie Dalton's conscience was at work, and when her husband drew near to death she was fast falling into despair. Hence her bitter anguish when, kneeling by her husband's side, she realized that he was fast going from her sight, and told herself that "she should never see him again, because she had sinned against light, and past forgiveness."

For Jennie had yet to learn what are the heights

and depths of God's forgiving love and long-suffering mercy. But she did see her sin, and her cry for pardon ascended to the throne where her God waited to be gracious, and to give her an answer of peace. "I, even I, am He that blotteth out thy transgressions, and will not remember thy sins."

CHAPTER V.

GRACE TRIUMPHANT.

"Master! how shall I bless Thy Name,
For love so great to me,
For the sweet enablings of Thy grace,
So sovereign yet so free,
That have taught me to obey Thy word,
And cast my care on Thee?"

F. R. HAVERGAL.

THE day following Tom Dalton's death Ida Spencer paid a visit to the widow after leaving the Sunday school. She found the shutters of the little shop closed, instead of being, as usual, partly open. But she thought nothing of this, as death was in the house, and was quite unprepared for the joyful surprise in store for her.

Mrs. Dalton greeted her visitor with evident pleasure. Her face was wan and worn with weeping, but, in spite of that, there was a look different to its ordinary expression, as Miss Spencer noticed.

The visitor was only just seated when a knock at

the door called Mrs. Dalton away. She left the door into the shop open, so Miss Spencer heard what passed.

"A bundle o' wood, please," said a child's voice.

"I cannot give it to you to-day, my dear. I do not sell on Sunday now."

Mrs. Dalton returned to her visitor, but before either could make a remark a louder knock was heard. The applicant for admission this time was a woman who spoke very roughly.

"What's this my gal tells me—that you won't let her have any wood?"

"I am not going to sell on Sunday any more," was the quiet answer.

"So you used to say before; but you could sell fast enough when it suited you," sneered the new-comer.

"Yes, I did very wrong. But, God helping me, I will not do it again."

"I suppose you're so mighty pious all at once because you've got a corpse in the house."

Mrs. Dalton winced. "That is not the reason I never mean to open on Sunday again."

"Come now, that won't do for me, so don't give me none o' your canting humbug! I want that wood, and I mean to have it, so you'd better fork out pretty quick. Come, my good soul, do let me have it," she went on, speaking now in a coaxing way. "There's my poor baby a screaming itself into fits with stomach-ache, and I ain't got a drop o' hot water nor a stick to light a fire. Come, be a good creature, and I'll pay double."

"It's not the money I think of, Mrs. Tomson. I'll

give you a bundle of wood, and welcome, if your baby is ill. And I've got a big kettle just on the boil which you shall have; but I cannot *sell* to-day."

"Thank you," replied the woman in an altered tone. "You're a good sort, after all. But look here, don't you go and be a fool. You'll lose all your customers if you won't oblige them at a pinch, and you've got a lot o' childer to find bread for all by yourself. Now if you will really let me have the hot water I will be truly obliged, and I'll bring back your kettle."

Miss Spencer's heart throbbed with thankfulness as she listened to the foregoing conversation, and when Mrs. Dalton returned to her she spoke on the subject, asking what had caused her to determine to close her shop on Sunday.

"You see, miss, I had felt for a long time how wicked I was, and yesterday as I knelt by my Tom, and heard you and him a-talking, I seemed to see all at once what a sinner I was; and I then made up my mind that, come what will, I will never open again o' Sundays."

"I fear that you will have great difficulties," said Miss Spencer. "The neighbours will all oppose you, and try their utmost to make you break your resolution. You must be prepared to find your path a very uphill one; but God will give you grace to persevere if you wait on Him. 'Be strong and of a good courage,' for 'greater is He that is with you, than he that is with them.'"

The day following was that fixed for the meeting together at the clergyman's house of those engaged in

the special work of which I have spoken. These meetings took place once a month. The clergyman being recognized as the head, to whom all the workers were, in measure, responsible, each one, in turn, spoke of his or her work, telling of hindrances or encouragements met with, and receiving hints for future guidance. Each worker also gave an account of money expended in the district, and its objects.

After the business was concluded the clergyman read and expounded a short portion of Scripture, and prayed. These little meetings were most enjoyable, and were both a refreshment and help to the workers; and many a one who entered that quiet study feeling discouraged and sad, departed cheered and hopeful.

On this occasion Ida Spencer had much to tell about the Daltons, and her tale of the victory of God's grace in the widow's heart was listened to with sympathy and interest.

"The poor woman will need all our prayers that she may be enabled to stand steadfast," said Mr. Barton. "I have no doubt that she will have a hard battle to fight, for the neighbours are sure to persecute her, and tempt her to break her resolution. We must do all in our power to strengthen her hands, and encourage her."

"Has this poor woman a large family?" asked one of the visitors.

"Seven; three boys and four little girls. The eldest, a lad of fourteen, is errand boy to Dobbs the shoemaker on Holborn Hill; but the others are dependent upon the mother as yet."

"Would either of the boys do for us?" asked the clergyman's wife. "I want a boy for two or three hours in the morning, to clean boots and knives and run errands. I should give him half a crown a week and his breakfast; and if he was kept longer than usual he would have his dinner. What do you think, Miss Spencer?"

"I think Charley would do," was the reply. "He is only ten, but he is a big boy for his age."

"Then perhaps you will arrange the matter for us with the mother," said Mr. Barton. "I must trust to you, Miss Spencer, to look after the family for me. We must not let them starve; but, at the same time, we must be careful not to pauperize them. The right way will be to help them to help themselves. Do you understand what I mean?"

"Perfectly. I am very anxious that the poor woman should succeed. It seems as if it would be for God's glory that it should be seen that He does care for His servants," said Miss Spencer, who then told how she had pointed out to Mrs. Dalton that she was robbing God by selling on Sunday, and urged her to trust Him. She quite forgot her natural timidity while speaking, and more than one of those present gazed admiringly at the sweet, earnest face of the speaker.

Something was said about Dalton's funeral, and Miss Spencer remarked, "That is one thing of which I wanted to speak. The poor widow is sadly grieved to have her husband buried by the parish, but she cannot do otherwise without running into debt, which

she feels would be wrong. So my sister and I thought that, if you approve, we should like to pay for a simple funeral. I have not said anything to Mrs. Dalton yet, lest you should have some objection to the plan. Do you object? It would save the poor thing some pain."

"Not at all. I object to *pampering;* but this is a very different thing. It is a case in which to give a helping hand is quite justifiable. But I do not think it will be necessary for you and your sister to bear the whole expense," said Mr. Barton.

There was a strong bond of union between these Christian workers, who, by their actions seemed to enter fully into the spirit of the precept, "Bear ye one another's burdens." As soon as Mr. Barton ceased speaking, all present expressed a wish to share in the funeral expenses, and it was arranged that each one should put down the sum which it was felt right to contribute, and that the Miss Spencers should add what they pleased. This being done it was found that the amount contributed was sufficient for the desired purpose.

"I will arrange for a simple walking funeral," said Mr. Barton, "and any residue which there may be after the bill is paid I will retain to be expended in any way likely to be of most benefit to the family. Perhaps you will kindly tell the widow what has been done, Miss Spencer. As the idea originated with you, it is only right that you should have the pleasure of relieving the poor woman's distress."

Ida gladly undertook this mission, and she was the

bearer of a promise that suitable mourning should be provided for the widow.

When Mrs. Dalton heard what had been arranged she was quite overcome, and unable to speak at first. When her agitation was calmed she exclaimed—

"Oh, how great is His goodness! To think that God should thus care for one who has so sinned against Him as I have!"

There is no doubt that the tender consideration and sympathy shown for her at this period of her life gave Mrs. Dalton a fresh insight into the exceeding greatness of God's forgiving love, and besides, encouraged her to seek meekly to take up her cross and follow her Lord. As the clergyman had foreseen, this cross proved to be very heavy, so that she needed all the help which Christian love and sympathy could give.

CHAPTER VI.

LOWERING CLOUDS.

"Then cheerly to your work again
With hearts new-braced and set
To run, untired, love's blessèd race;
As meet for those, who face to face
Over the grave their Lord have met."

KEBLE.

MR. BARTON fulfilled his promise of making all necessary arrangements, and, on the Thursday following his death, Tom Dalton was carried to his last resting-place in the graveyard of St. Andrew's, Holborn. The widow was quite calm as she stood by her husband's grave and listened to the beautiful service read by Mr. Barton. Her grief seemed almost merged in thankfulness as she dwelt in thought upon the bliss of the ransomed soul in the presence of the Redeemer. Since the light from on high had shone into her heart she seemed, as it were, to hear with new ears; and although her desolation was great as she saw the

grave close over her best earthly treasure, she realized in all its fulness the blessedness of having the Lord for her portion. And, strengthened and refreshed, she turned towards her home to start afresh upon the heavenward path.

When first she re-entered her desolate home, and realized that now she had to begin life without him who, for so many years, had been her loving companion and guide, she understood the full bitterness of widowhood, and her sobs of anguish broke out afresh. But then she reminded herself of the many tokens she had lately received of the love and care of Him who is the Father of the fatherless and the God of the widow, and encouraged herself in the Lord.

Well was it for her that she did not know how sore were the trials and difficulties that awaited her, or her faith might have failed. Sometimes we are tempted to wish that we could look into the future; but it is one of the greatest proofs of the tender love of our God, that we cannot know what lies before us. If we could see what will befall us, our hearts must oft-times faint with fear. So the future is mercifully hidden from our eyes. We need only live for each day as it comes, taking one step at a time, clinging to the Almighty Hand that leads us. And so doing, we shall find the needed strength for every step of our way. Truly "happy is that people, that is in such a case: yea, happy is that people, whose God is the Lord."

The week following her husband's death was a busy one to Mrs. Dalton. She had more customers

in her little shop than ever before, and began to hope that she would not have much trouble as to her intention of Sunday closing; but she was mistaken. The fact was, that although some few might have had kindly intentions in going to her shop, the greater number were drawn there by curiosity to see how she bore herself under her sorrow.

When Sunday came round again a knock was heard at the door much earlier than usual, and before the widow had finished dressing her children. Following the clergyman's advice, Mrs. Dalton spoke from the window.

The applicant was a very grimy looking woman, well known to Mrs. Dalton as a drunken virago, and one of the worst characters anywhere about. In reply to the widow's inquiry, "Who is there?" she cried, "It's me. Make haste down, please, for my man's a calling for his breakfast, and I wants 'errins and lots o' things."

"I am sorry for that, for I am never going to sell on Sunday again, as I told you last week."

This reply was greeted by a shout of derisive laughter, followed by the words, "Oh yes; we know all about that. You said so before, or rather, your man said it for you."

"Indeed I mean what I say now. I shall never open on a Sunday again."

The answer was an expression which cannot be repeated; then the woman called across the court to a friend who stood at her door.

"I say, Sal, ain't this a good joke? 'Ere's Mrs.

Dalton a settin' up for a saint now." Then, once more turning her attention to the widow, she continued, "Now don't you be an 'ypocrite. Come down and get me what I wants, and be quick about it."

"Not to-day, Mrs. Fagan. As early as you please to-morrow I will attend to you."

"Ya-a-h!" shrieked the virago. "Then you'll never see the colour o' my money agen, I can tell you! I'll find a way o' making you oblige me, or else make you wish as you was a-lyin' by your man in the churchyard!"

Mrs. Dalton shut down her window, feeling sick at heart. She soon had to open it again, and so it went on for several hours. Her firm refusal to sell called forth such a volley of abuse and foul language as made the poor creature cower.

She did not go to church until evening; then, as she joined in the prayers and listened to the sermon, peace crept into her heart again. She thought that the sermon seemed preached especially for her; and, indeed, in measure it was, for Mr. Barton caught sight of the widow in the corner in which her husband had been used to sit, and tried to say a word of hope and cheer to her. The text, the widow, with joy took as a special message from God to herself. "Fear thou not; for I am with thee: be not dismayed; for I am thy God: I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of My righteousness" (Isa. xli. 10).

Charlie entered upon his place as errand-boy at Mr. Barton's, in high glee at the thought that he was

able to help his mother. Ned, the second boy, found for himself a place at a greengrocer's near; so all the boys were earning something towards their keep.

Before Dalton had been dead a month a place was found for Mary, the eldest girl, who was nearly nine years old. She was a gentle, sweet-tempered child, very like her father, and was a favourite with the mistress of the school which the little girl attended. Mrs. Smart was a kind-hearted, Christian woman; and when she noticed little Mary's black frock and sad face she questioned her as to the cause, and drew from her the tale of sorrow. The next evening, after having consulted her husband, she went to see Mrs. Dalton. Surprised to meet with so superior a woman in such a low neighbourhood, Mrs. Smart showed so much real sympathy with the widow's troubles as quite to win her heart, and from that time was one of her truest friends. By way of helping Mrs. Dalton she proposed to take little Mary into her own house to help her with her little children out of school hours. She said she would give her a shilling a week and her board, and the widow gladly accepted this offer, feeling that the plan had a double advantage, in that it would remove the little girl from undesirable associations, besides giving her one child fewer to support. She had already begun to find that it would be hard work to provide for those dependent upon her. During her husband's illness she had, with all her care, got behindhand with the rent; so she had arrears to make up, besides the regular sum for each week as it came.

Miss Spencer had succeeded in obtaining needlework for her, at which she busied herself early and late; but the money she was able to earn at this employment was quite insufficient for the needs of her family, although she was paid a fair price for her work.

When a third Sunday came round, and again the little shop was shut, the rage of the would-be customers was greater than ever. The shop was besieged, and showers of stones beat against the door and the closed shutters. Men and boys hung about the door, shouting out abusive epithets; and when the children went out to go to the Sunday school they were pelted and insulted, so that they came home crying. During the preceding week numbers of the neighbours, apparently affably inclined, had come to the widow, endeavouring their utmost to induce her to break through her resolution. Promises were lavished upon her of increased custom if only she would oblige them on Sundays, these promises being coupled with threats of withdrawing their favours altogether if she refused their request.

To one and all the same answer was given. She now knew how greatly she had sinned against God in dishonouring His day, but she would do it no more.

They told her that she would certainly have to go to the workhouse, and she replied, "*That* she must leave in God's hands; but she could not disobey Him." Then they tried ridicule, but all in vain. The widow stood her ground firmly, and some of her tormentors began to think that they might just as well leave her alone.

But Mrs. Fagan, more ingenious in her wickedness than her neighbours, conceived a plot which she thought would drive Mrs. Dalton to extremity. Under strict promise of secrecy, she confided this plot to some of her friends, who greatly commended the idea; and it was whispered from one to another, until by degrees, some with whom Mrs. Fagan had been at daggers drawn made common cause with her over the cruel scheme of persecution of the woman who was looked upon as a general enemy.

CHAPTER VII.

A CRUEL CONSPIRACY.

"God gives!—there is no fear
That I of want shall die;
Though hunger come right near,
Mercy is still more nigh.
He has yet bread!
I shall be fed,—
In thirsty deserts well supplied,
In days of famine satisfied."

ANNA WARNER.

ALL through the week of which I have spoken Jennie Dalton had toiled unceasingly, hoping to earn enough to pay the arrears of rent. She had given no hint of her difficulty to Miss Spencer, which was a pity; for had she done so, Mr. Barton would have devoted some of the money which he held in trust for the Dalton family to settling the landlord's claim. All this time she had taken no food but bread and tea, Miss Spencer having given her a little store of the latter article.

For her children she bought milk, and butter for their bread.

She always made it a practice to go out on a Saturday evening, when Tom brought home his wages, to buy some necessaries, and a little meat for the Sunday's dinner. She was a good cook, and she was in the habit of preparing a stew with potatoes, which she could get all ready on Saturday night. When once it was in the saucepan and had come to the boil it required no more attention, but finished cooking by the side of the fire. In this way she was able to give her children a comfortable hot dinner, without being kept from church herself.

The scheme in Mrs. Fagan's head was to steal this dinner while the family were at church. She was an arrant busybody, who knew everybody's affairs, and as she lived opposite the Daltons, she had ample opportunities for finding out their habits; and she felt sure of success, for she had discovered that her door-key fitted the lock of Mrs. Dalton's shop door. She watched the house on this Saturday evening, and saw the widow go out as usual, but return after a very short absence. The reason of this was that the poor woman had no money to spend on meat this week, and so had only bought bread and a small piece of cheese.

When she got home, Tom, who had been taking care of the shop during his mother's absence, told her that one of the neighbours had been in to ask her to go and see her baby, who had been in a fit. Mrs. Dalton, who was always ready to do a kindness,

obeyed this summons without delay, having asked Tom to clean the children's boots ready for Sunday school. For this purpose Tom went into a little shed at the back, where he was soon busy at his work, whistling cheerily meanwhile. This fact was not lost upon Mrs. Fagan, who considered it an opportunity not to be neglected. She had been hanging about outside her door when Mrs. Dalton returned from her marketing expedition, and had seen the widow put down some loaves of bread on the counter of her little shop. To take these, as well as the Sunday's dinner, would be a capital joke, she told herself, and make her revenge very complete. The wicked thought was at once acted upon. Mrs. Fagan stepped quickly across to Mrs. Dalton's house, opened the door quietly, put the loaves and the piece of cheese into her apron, and returned to her own house unseen by mortal eyes.

Mrs. Dalton found her neighbour's baby very ill, and she stayed watching it until the fits had ceased, and the little one was sleeping quietly. It was then very late, and after she had given her boys their supper, and conducted the simple family worship, they all went to bed, and the mother never gave a thought to the purchases which she had left on her counter.

When morning came the shop was besieged quite early. Mrs. Dalton spoke from the window to the first party, saying that "she had no intention of opening her shop, and should not answer any more knocks." She was rather surprised that, in spite of

this assurance, the applicants remained hanging about the shop, chatting and joking among themselves. But she soon understood all about it.

When her children were dressed she went down to get breakfast. Tom had—as he always did on Sunday—lighted the fire, put on the kettle, and laid the cloth. Mrs. Dalton took from the cupboard half a loaf, and then, for the first time, remembered that she had left in the shop the bread bought the previous evening. She went to fetch a loaf, and, not finding it, called to Tom, who was in the kitchen, to ask if he had moved it. Immediately a jeering remark shouted through the keyhole enlightened her as to the disappearance of the bread, and also as to the reason why her would-be customers had not gone away. They had remained to enjoy her discomfiture.

This malicious trick was the last straw. The widow broke down and burst into a fit of hysterical tears, weeping until she could weep no longer. Then she cut up the bread that was left, and giving a small piece to each child, she put by the remainder to be eaten at dinner-time. She did not take any herself, and Tom refused his share, saying that "the little ones needed it more than he did."

The poor woman felt so ill from her fit of crying that she was quite unable to go to church—greatly to the discomfiture of Mrs. Fagan and her associates, who, not aware that the widow had no food in the house, imagined that she remained at home to prepare a specially good dinner to make up to her children for the loss of their breakfast.

They would have been gleefully triumphant could they have taken a peep at the poor victim of their cruelty, when all her children but little Jessie were gone to church. Sick and faint from want of food, she threw herself upon her bed, and sobbed in anguish of soul, for she felt as if God had forsaken her. She was sorely tempted to give up the fight, and to go down and open the door to the applicants who knocked frequently. But the tender Saviour who is touched with the feelings of our infirmities, who, in that He hath suffered, being tempted, is able to succour them that are tempted, had not forgotten His tried servant. In this hour of scathing temptation the thought of His sympathy was brought to her mind. She remembered His words to His servant St. Peter. "Satan hath desired to have you that he might sift you as wheat; but I have prayed for thee that thy faith fail not." And a sense of peace and rest crept into her heart; and, comforted and encouraged to resist the temptation that beset her, she was enabled to possess her soul in patience.

That afternoon Ida Spencer felt a strong impulse to go and see Mrs. Dalton after school. She was not well, and was very tired, but the impression was so strong upon her mind that her humble friend needed comfort, that, as soon as her class was dismissed, she turned her steps towards the little shop. As usual, there were several people standing about the passage and court; amongst others Mrs. Fagan, who, as Miss Spencer passed her, made an insulting remark which drove the colour from the girl's cheek, although she

took no notice of the woman, but passed quietly on to Mrs. Dalton's house.

Her knock was answered from the upper window by Charlie, who, on seeing her uttered a joyful cry, "Mother, here's our lady!" and ran quickly downstairs to open the door.

When Miss Spencer entered the little kitchen, she was surprised to see Mrs. Dalton leaning back in an armchair, pale as death, with purple rings round her eyes, and quiet tears stealing down her face. Ned sat by the fire, looking as sulky as a bear, and the little girls were fretting. She took one of them into her arms, asking with some wonder—

"Why, Tottie, what's the matter?"

"Me want my tea," sobbed the little one.

"Tottie must wait a little, and then mammy will give her some tea. Poor mammy is ill," said Miss Spencer soothingly.

"No, she won't," interrupted Ned roughly. "We ain't got no tea, and we 'av'nt 'ad no dinner—leastways only a mossel o' dry bread. We ain't got nuffin to eat at all."

The visitor looked from one to another. Mrs. Dalton was sobbing so violently that she could not speak at first, and when she controlled herself sufficiently for utterance, it was in a voice choked by sobs that she cried—

"My sin has found me out. God has forsaken me, and my children will starve." And again she burst into an agony of weeping.

"God never forsakes His people," said Miss Spencer,

gently. "Bread shall be given you, and water shall be sure."

"Tottie so hungry. Tottie wants her tea," began the little one again.

"What is the matter, Tom?" cried Miss Spencer, turning to the boy, who just then came into the room. "Do tell me what this means."

Thus urged, Tom told what had happened.

"It's mother's own fault," Ned broke in here. "What for does she go for to anger the neighbours by shuttin' up o' Sundays? She didn't use to do it."

This remark roused the widow. "Ned, be silent," she said. "I've told you that I know I sinned against God, but, by His help, I will do it no more."

"I don't care! You ain't got no manner o' right to go for to starve us," grumbled the boy. "Nor I won't starve! I'll run away and go to sea!"

"Hush, Ned. Don't speak so to your mother; you would not do so if your father were here," said Miss Spencer gravely.

Ned did not speak any more aloud, but he muttered to himself, and the poor mother again began to cry bitterly. "God is punishing me," she wailed; "I thought He had forgiven me." And she rocked herself backwards and forwards in her misery.

Miss Spencer saw that this was no time to talk, so she laid her hand gently on the widow's shoulder, saying simply—

"God *has* forgiven you; but we will speak of that another time. You must have food before anything

else. Now, what can we do? Can I take Tom to see what I can find at home?"

"Oh yes, miss; and would you take Ned also?" said the poor mother, with an imploring glance, which the young lady interpreted as meaning that she wanted the boy out of her way just then.

"Oh yes," she answered cheerfully; "I shall be glad to have two boys to help carry my things. Get your cap, Ned; and, Tom, bring your mother's marketing basket."

"Now, Tottie, be very good to poor mammy while 'Dady' is gone to get her some nice tea," she said coaxingly to the little girl in her arms, who always called her "Dady."

The party set out and walked briskly to Miss Spencer's home in Tavistock Square. The boys waited in the hall while the young lady sought her friend, Mrs. Winterlow, confided to her the difficulty she was in, and accompanied her to see what the larder contained.

Fortunately, plenty of good things were forthcoming, and the basket was soon filled with bread, butter, cheese, a packet of cocoa, a little cold meat, and a bottle of milk. Some good nourishing soup was also put into a can, for Miss Spencer saw that the poor widow needed something that would be strengthening.

Armed with these treasures, Miss Spencer and the boys made the best of their way back, where their appearance was greeted with joyful cries from Charlie and the little girls.

Tom produced two saucepans, into one of which was

put soup, into the other milk, and very soon the little girls were made happy with bread and milk, and the boys were provided with a good basin of soup each.

Mrs. Dalton was too faint to bestir herself, and, as soon as the children's wants were satisfied, Miss Spencer put some hot soup into a basin, and tried to get the poor mother to take it; but in vain. She turned sick as soon as she attempted to eat, and so Miss Spencer put it aside, and having made some crisp toast, which she cut into slips, she poured some tea into a cup, and set to work to feed the widow with her own hands. By degrees the faintness passed off, and she was able to enjoy some of the soup later. When she was well enough to talk, she said—

"How am I to thank you for all your kindness, ma'am? It was faithless of me to think that God had forsaken me; He sent you to me, I am sure."

"Of course He did. 'I am poor and needy; yet the Lord thinketh upon me,' David says in the fortieth Psalm, and I always feel that this is such a sweet thought. If you *could* remember this it would make your life so much easier; and you have so many troubles to bear."

"I could bear the trouble better if I had not brought it upon myself by my sin," said Mrs. Dalton sadly.

"I think you should not let your thoughts dwell upon that point so much. Of course it is right to be humbled for the sins of the past, but that is very different to morbidly dwelling upon them. The way to grow in grace is to look at our Lord Jesus Christ,

HELP IN TIME OF NEED. [*See page* 59.

not at ourselves. You know St. Paul says, 'Forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark.' Do you see what I mean?"

"Yes, miss, I think I understand, and I will try *always* to remember. This morning when the children were at church, and I was thinking of all God's goodness, I grew quite happy and peaceful, though the neighbours was doing all they could to worry me. Then the poor children cried so for their dinner, and I felt so bad, and the comfort all went away."

"I know well what that is. But is it not blessed to know that, however *we* may change, Jesus is always the same—always watching over us with unwearied care? We need no worthiness of our own to make Him care for us. It was sinners He came to save; the wandering sheep He seeks with patient love. That often comforts me."

This conversation passed while the boys were gone to get ready to go to church. When they returned to the kitchen, Miss Spencer spoke to them of God's loving care, and of His promise that those "who fear the Lord shall not want any good thing." She spoke also of the blessings promised to those who keep God's own day holy, saying, in conclusion—

"You know that your mother shuts up her shop on Sunday, because God has said that we are not to work on His day, and as she loves God she wishes to please Him."

"Mother used to sell on Sunday," said Charlie.

"Yes; but she is very sorry now, and asks God

to forgive her, for Jesus Christ's sake, and she will never do it again. She will trust to God to send her help when she is in need; and you must do so too, and ask Him to give you food or whatever you want. Shall I tell you a story about this?"

"Oh do, please!" cried all the children.

"Well, there is a very dear little boy I know; he is not much older than Tottie. He has a very happy home, a kind father and mother, and plenty of food and warm clothes. When it was cold last winter, this dear little boy was very sad because he was told that there were numbers of children who were both cold and hungry, and had not even bread to eat. One day his nurse called him to come to his tea; but he asked her if he might first finish a letter he was writing before he had his tea.

"'A letter, dearie! Who are you writing to?' asked his nurse, who knew that little Georgie could not write properly.

"'I am writing to God, nursie, to ask him to send lots of bread to the baker, to give to the poor children who have not got any.'

"Then his nurse explained to him that though God was in heaven, and seemed far away, we need not *write* to Him, because He can hear us when we pray, and so we need only tell Him our wants. So, then, Georgie prayed to God to send the bread, and then went happily to have his own tea." *

"*I* telled God that we hadn't got no tea. Did God tell you?" asked little seven-year-old Annie.

* A real occurrence.

"No, dear, He did not tell me; but He made me want to come and see mammy, that I might find that you had no food, and get it for you. He heard your prayer, you see, and gave you what you wanted, didn't He?"

"Yes," said the little one, with a bright face. "I'll always tell God what we want."

Quiet tears stole down the face of the mother, who felt that her faithlessness was rebuked by the simple trust of her own little child, while at the same time she was sure that her hands would be strengthened thereby.

Miss Spencer's own eyes were moist as she rose to go; and as she took leave of the widow she murmured, "Out of the mouths of babes and sucklings hast Thou perfected praise."

CHAPTER VIII.

PERSECUTED, BUT NOT FORSAKEN.

"Oh, trust thyself to Jesus
When thou art full of care
For loved ones, still refusing
Our blessed hope to share;
Then is the hour for trusting
The Lord to bring them nigh;
Then is the time for singing,
'He loves them more than I.'"

THE system of persecution against the Daltons waxed hotter and hotter. When any of them appeared, they were greeted with hoots, jeers, and opprobrious epithets, or pelted with stones, lumps of dirt, or various unsavoury missiles. During the week the shop was forsaken; but on Sunday, from early morning till late evening, people hammered at the door at intervals. One favourite species of torment was a collection of the roughest women under the windows, at the time when, as they had discovered, the Daltons had family

prayers. The wretched creatures would get close to the windows, tap on the glass, or shout vile songs at the top of their voices. They were positively ingenious in inventing plans of torture.

All this the widow could have endured. Their ill-treatment of herself she received as a cross to be borne meekly for her Saviour's sake; but one thing was well-nigh breaking her heart, and that was the ill-behaviour of her boy Ned. He greatly resented the short commons of food which was the family portion, and made his home miserable by perpetual grumbling. He had taken also to slipping out of the house, whenever he could, to consort with bad boys. And hard as it was to see her children hungry, the pain of her boy's wrong-doing far exceeded all other that Mrs. Dalton had to bear.

One day, when food had been very short at dinner-time, she saw Ned coming along, eating a roll. Directly he saw his mother he tried to hide it; and immediately an awful dread came into her mind that the boy had stolen the roll.

"Ned, where did you get that?" she said.

"From Jones's, round the corner," he said sulkily.

"Did you *take* it, Ned?"

The boy grew scarlet, but did not answer.

"Oh, Ned! How could you do it? To think that one of my boys should be a thief!"

"Can't help it. I was so awful hungry!" he said sullenly. "It's your fault, mother."

"If you had told me you were so hungry, Ned, I would gladly have given you all my share at tea-time."

"No, mother, I ain't so bad as that comes to. You didn't have no dinner; and it's not likely I was goin' for to take your tea. Why, your face is white as white now."

"It's far worse to steal, my boy. *That* is a sin against God. But, come, we must go and pay for it."

"No, I won't!" cried Ned.

"Yes, you will," answered his mother, grasping his hand firmly. "You will come with me now."

Finding that resistance was useless, Ned went with his mother, who did not stop to put on her outdoor garments.

Fortunately, the shop was empty. The baker came from the little parlour to see what was wanted.

"I am very sorry, Mr. Jones, but my boy here took a roll out of your shop just now, and I've brought him to pay for it. Please forgive him this once. He was so very hungry."

As she spoke, the tears rolled down her thin, pale face, and the baker, who was a kind-hearted man, was touched by her evident grief.

"Don't take on so, missus," he said kindly. "Your boy's but a bit of a lad, and it's terrible bad to have an empty stomach, as I know well. He won't do the like again, I'll be bound. Look here, my lad," he continued, putting his hand on Ned's head, "if you feel that hungry again, just you come along and tell me. You shall have a roll—or two, if you like, and welcome; but don't help yourself, because that's wicked, you know."

"It's downright dreadful to me that any son of mine should steal," said the widow sadly.

"He won't ever do it again, missus, I'm main sure; so don't you fret. Here, mother," he called loudly, as Mrs. Dalton staggered against the counter and sank into a chair that stood there, "come here, will you?"

The call was responded to by a comely, middle-aged woman, who, when she saw Mrs. Dalton, went quickly to her. As she passed her husband, he whispered—

"The poor soul's half starved, I take it."

"Poor dear, you're faint," said Mrs. Jones kindly. "Why, your hands are quite cold! Just you come in and rest a bit. My tea's just ready, and we'll have a cup together."

Too ill to refuse the friendly proposal, Mrs. Dalton suffered herself to be half led, half carried into the little parlour, where she was put into an easy-chair by the fireside. As soon as she revived a little her kind neighbour brought tea and toast, and insisted upon her making a good meal, while the baker saw that Ned's wants were satisfied; and when the widow went away the baker forced a four pound loaf upon her.

"Come, missus," he said, when she hesitated to accept it, "just you think as how the good Lord gives it you, *then* you won't mind taking it—and all good things *do* come from Him, you know."

Mrs. Dalton was greatly cheered by the baker's kindness, but she was sore at heart on account of Ned's theft; the more so because he did not appear to be either softened or humbled. He trudged along

by her side, giving only short gruff answers when his mother spoke to him. Presently he said roughly—

"I don't see as I'm bit a worse nor you, mother. Parson said as how you robbed God when you sold o' Sundays, and that must be wickeder than for me just to prig a little roll when I was fit to drop, I were that hungry."

There was a stolid look of defiance on the boy's face as he spoke, and the mother's heart ached as she noticed this, and as her conscience told her that she herself had cast a stumbling-block in his way.

That night, when all her children were asleep in their beds, she knelt long in prayer, and with streaming eyes entreated God that, as He had pardoned her sin for His dear Son's sake, so He would be graciously pleased to put away its consequences, and to have mercy upon her boy. Perhaps never before had she so realized what an evil and a bitter thing sin is, as now that she saw the fruits of her wrong-doing, and had to endure the keenest sting which can pierce the heart, the consciousness that we have helped to drag another along the road that leadeth to destruction.

Never in vain does the cry of a contrite sinner ascend to the throne of God. "Before they call, I will answer; and while they are yet speaking, I will hear," are His own gracious words. And even as she prayed comfort crept into the widow's soul. She remembered how, when the friends of the man sick of the palsy let him down through the roof to the feet of the Saviour, "Jesus seeing *their* faith, said to the

sick of the palsy, Son, be of good cheer, thy sins be forgiven thee." So, in faith, she laid her boy at the feet of Jesus; and when to her remembrance were brought the words, "I have seen his ways, and I will heal him," she rose from her knees assured that her prayers were heard, and that—though it might not be until after many days—her boy would arise and go to his Father, and be embraced in the arms of His forgiving love.

Somehow the tale of Ned's fall leaked out, and thus the poor mother's foes were furnished with a double-edged weapon with which to torture her. Once again her shop was largely patronized, solely, so it seemed, for the purpose of giving opportunities for making spiteful remarks that wrung the widow's heart. She was now called upon to pass through a very furnace of affliction, through a sevenfold heated fire. But she was not left in it alone. The Refiner was seated by, watching with love and sympathy. Not one unneeded pang would she be allowed to endure. When the dross was purged away, and the gold so purified as to reflect the Master's image, all pain and grief would have an end.

The widow spoke but little of the persecution to which she was subjected, but her pastor well knew what a fiery trial her's was, and he tried by frequent visits and evident sympathy to strengthen her hands. For some reason best known to themselves, these visits were a special grievance to the neighbours. The sight of Mr. Barton entering Mrs. Dalton's house was a signal for the most depraved of the dwellers in

the court to assemble under her windows, to raise a disturbance by the singing of ribald songs and the use of blasphemous language.

Sometimes they actually persecuted the clergyman by throwing dirty water over him, pelting him with cabbage-stalks or rotten eggs. He never resented this behaviour, but, like the Master whom he served, he patiently endured "the contradiction of sinners against himself," while bearing the good tidings of great joy to all who would receive them. From time to time his heart was gladdened with the knowledge of some sinner being turned from the error of his ways.

He had special cause to rejoice over Mrs. Dalton, for in her the grace of God was abundantly manifested. Deeply humbled on account of the sin whereby she had "caused the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme," she seldom talked on religious subjects. But her life was eloquent, and through all she said there ran a thread of implied faith and hope in God; and she manifested a spirit of Christian love by the way in which she seized every opportunity of doing a kindness to those who, as she knew, were always watching for her halting, hoping to see her fall.

For a long time it seemed as though the more she tried to disarm her tormentors the more spiteful they became. The fact was that they hated her because she condemned them silently. Such a life as hers was worth fifty sermons, for by her conduct she preached Christ in a way that all could understand. And the time came when she knew that this silent teaching had not been lost.

CHAPTER IX.

NED IS IN TROUBLE.

"My son, if sinners entice thee, consent thou not."
Proverbs i. 10.

MRS. DALTON confided to her clergyman her trouble on account of Ned's misconduct; but he decided, after much thought, that as the boy's mother had remonstrated seriously with him, it would be better that he himself should not mention the subject, but content himself with using every means to acquire a good influence over Ned. His reason for this reticence was a fear lest the boy should be made reckless by the knowledge that his clergyman knew of his lapse from honesty, and fall into worse mischief.

So far as Mrs. Dalton could know, Ned seemed to be going on steadily, going to his work as usual each day, and to a night-school in the evening.

A fortnight after the business about the roll, Mrs.

Dalton spoke one day of her anxiety about the rent. Her landlord was angry, and insisted upon all arrears being paid up without delay.

"I don't know how ever I shall manage it," she sighed. "I don't see that I could do more work unless I sit up nearly all night."

"You mustn't do that, mother dear, you'll be ill. Don't fret. I'll try and get some jobs after I leave work to-night," said Tom.

Ned did not speak, but the next evening when he came home he put two shillings into his mother's hand, saying—

"That'll help, won't it, mother?"

"Very much, Ned. How good of you, my boy! But I don't need it for the rent, after all, for Mr. Barton gave me some money which he says some one gave him for me this afternoon. So I'll take care of this for you. How did you get it, dear?"

She stooped to kiss him as she spoke, for he was sitting on a footstool by the fire. He received her thanks ungraciously, and did not answer her question. Supposing that he was very tired, she did not notice his cross manner, and said cheerily—

"Did an angel give it you, Ned?"

Ned shook off the hand she laid on his shoulder and said roughly—

"Don't bother. A gentleman gave it me for carryin' his bag."

The mother, at a loss to account for this bad behaviour, thought that perhaps, like some men, he did not like to be thanked, so she said no more.

Then remembering that the boys had only had bread and a mite of cheese each for their dinner, she put away her work and began to get supper.

"I think that now Ned has helped me so much, I may afford you boys a treat," she said, as she brought two bloaters from the shop, and put them down to the fire. When they were ready she called the boys to the table, but Ned refused the herrings, eating only bread-and-butter.

The poor boy was much to be pitied. He was miserable, and longed to put his head in his mother's lap and tell her what ailed him, but he did not dare. So he went off gloomily to bed, and soon after all lights were put out in the little house. Once, after she was in bed, Mrs. Dalton thought she heard sounds of sobbing in the boys' bedroom, and went to see what was the matter; but as they all seemed to be asleep, she supposed she was mistaken.

It was a long time before she slept, for she was musing sorrowfully about the change in Ned since his father's death. From a bright, merry, mischief-loving boy, he was turned into a sulky, ill-conditioned fellow, too often inclined to be saucy to his mother.

"And yet," she said to herself, "how dear it was of him to bring me that money the kind gentleman gave him. Many boys would have kept it themselves."

Then happier thoughts came to her as she remembered how, time after time, God had appeared to help her when her need was sore, as He had done this very day. She fell asleep while saying to herself those beautiful lines of Newton's--

"His love in time past forbids me to think
He'll leave me at last in trouble to sink;
Each sweet Ebenezer I have in review,
Confirms His good pleasure to help me quite through."

Poor Ned was too wretched to sleep. It was his sobs that disturbed his mother, but he pretended to be asleep when he heard her coming. He tossed about from one side to another till it was getting light, and when at last he fell into a feverish slumber it was disturbed by bad dreams, and he was unrefreshed when it was time to get up. All day he was very snappish in his manner, and once answered his mother so impertinently that she was forced to reprove him, upon which he seized his cap and rushed out of the house.

If we look back a little we shall see what ailed Ned. There are some natures to whom privation causes more suffering than it does to others. Ned was one of the former. Naturally weakly and delicate, the short allowance of food that had, of late, been the family portion had tried him far more than Tom, who was very strong. His was one of those dispositions which require most careful training. He was high-spirited, affectionate, generous, and sensitive to a degree. If he went wrong he would go very far wrong; whereas if he chose the path of right, he would press onward bravely. His mother understood something of this, and she suffered keenly from the consciousness that by her own fall she had made her boy lose his respect for her, and consequently had made it more difficult for him to obey her.

Poor Ned was very much to be pitied, for he was the victim of the malice of the neighbours, who, having

found that they could not persuade Mrs. Dalton into opening her shop to them on Sundays, had hit upon the fiendish scheme of paying her out by leading one of her boys to disgrace her. They had found out that Ned was discontented, and took every opportunity of fostering this feeling by talking, in his hearing, of his mother's folly in shutting her shop on Sunday, when, by selling on that day, she would have made money enough to keep her family in comfort and plenty. By this means they succeeded in making the boy think that he was hardly used by his mother, and so the first step was made towards the fulfilment of their desire.

The next step was easy enough. The boys in the court, incited by their elders, set upon Ned and jeered at him for going to the night-school. The boy was keenly sensitive to ridicule, and very soon gave up going to school, spending the time, which his mother supposed was spent there, in hanging about the streets with his new companions. When, however, he found out *how* these boys contrived to live without work, he was quite shocked, and tried to break with them. But they were too strong for him. Poor Ned knew nothing of that filial fear of God which alone could have kept him from falling in this time of temptation, so he went wrong.

Although he had looked on while his companions picked pockets, etc., he had never been guilty of stealing himself, until the day he stole the roll. That theft was an act of bravado. He had been dared to help himself, as a proof that he was not

a "mammy-sock." The wicked fellows knew well enough that if Ned once felt himself to be a thief they should establish such a hold over him that they would be able to make him do whatever they pleased. They thought that they had got him safely in their clutches, beyond the power of escape. But Ned was the child of many prayers, and the God of his father watched over him.

Early in his downward course he learnt that "the way of transgressors is hard." They who tempted him to sin contrived to convey the tale of his fall to his master. He was a very hard man, and the day after he received the information he paid Ned's wages and told him not to come back any more.

"Why, sir?" Ned asked in surprise.

Why? How *dare* you ask me such a question, you young rascal? But I'll tell you why, as you want to know. I don't want *thieves* about my shop. Now go. Don't let me catch you here again, or I'll set the police after you. Be off, will you, you young *gaol-bird!*" he added roughly, as the boy lingered, trying to find words in which to beg his master to trust him again.

Ned turned away, feeling sick at heart.

"I'll just go and tell mother all about it," he said to himself, as he turned homewards. Had he done so he would have spared both her and himself much sorrow. But his tormentors, who were lying in wait for him, told him that he would never get a place again, and had better try his luck with them.

"Don't you be such a silly as to go for to tell

your mother you've left old Higgs," said one, who seemed to have guessed Ned's intention. "She'd be safe to jaw at you; and she needn't never know as 'ow you've left. You come along o' me, and you'll get lots o' money; and you can take her 'alf a crown wot old Higgs giv' you, and go on the spree with the rest."

And poor Ned's good resolutions faded away, and he followed the evil advice pressed upon him, and said nothing about having lost his place. Still he had a longing to escape from his bad companions, and with this end in view he got up extra early the Monday following his dismissal from the greengrocer's, and trudged off to Covent Garden, in search of work.

He was soon engaged by a good-natured looking man to help unpack a cart-load of vegetables, and worked so hard that his employer gave him sixpence, saying kindly, "You're a brave, tidy little chap. Come along again to-morrer, and I'll give you another job."

Ned was almost happy as he walked home, though his back ached and he felt sick with hunger. "It won't matter my having left old Higgs if I have good days like this," he thought.

His mother made him go to bed directly after tea, having noticed that he looked ill; so he escaped his tormentors altogether that day, and he was equally successful the next. But they were determined that he should not elude them, and having tracked him, they persisted in keeping close to him. The sight

of the boy in such company excited the suspicions of the man who had employed him the two previous days, and, speaking shortly, he told him he did not want him any more.

It was on the evening of that day that Mrs. Dalton spoke of her trouble about the rent, thereby making poor Ned feel more miserable than ever All the next day he tried in vain for work, for Dick Fagan, the worst boy anywhere about, dogged his footsteps. But after dark, taking advantage of a crowd collected to watch a street fight, Ned gave Dick the slip, and running swiftly, and dodging down various alleys, he managed to get away alone.

Presently an omnibus stopped close by where he was standing, and a gentleman alighted carrying a good-sized bag. Ned went up to him, and touched his cap.

"Carry your bag for you, sir?" he said.

The gentleman gave him a sharp look before he answered, "All right, my lad. It's pretty heavy, and I have some distance to go. Can you do it?"

"Oh yes, sir, thankee, sir, I'll manage it," said Ned cheerfully, as he shouldered the bag and started off briskly with it.

The gentleman went to a house in one of the West-end squares. There he took his bag from Ned, saying, "There's sixpence for your trouble. Good night, my lad," and ran quickly up the steps and entered the house.

Ned turned slowly away, for he was very tired. As he did so the light from the street lamp flashed

upon the money in his hand, and he saw that it was not sixpence, but half a sovereign. For one moment Ned intended to return it, but the temptation was too strong, and he ran off as fast as he could go, fearing that the gentleman would discover his mistake. On his way home he changed the half-sovereign, put aside the sum he intended to give to his mother, and tied the remainder up in a piece of rag which he stowed away in his pocket, thinking that now he should have plenty of money to produce as his weekly wages for two or three weeks, even if he did not get work. But he was very unhappy, for he knew that he had taken a very decided step on the downward road, and this it was that made him so cross and disagreeable to every one in his home.

CHAPTER X.

HARD TO FORGIVE.

"Though they are slighting Him,
Jesus is waiting,
Waiting the penitent child to receive.
Plead with them earnestly;
Plead with them gently;
He will forgive if they only believe."

JUST at the time of poor Ned's wrong-doing the cholera was at its worse There had been several deaths near to the passage in which the Daltons lived, and every one who felt at all out-of-sorts was terrified, expecting to be the next victim. There had been several false alarms; but at last a real case of cholera, in its most virulent form, appeared, and a panic ensued among the other dwellers in the court. The victim was the husband of Mrs. Fagan, a frightful drunkard and reprobate. This couple were about the worst of the depraved characters with which the locality swarmed, and, as has been already seen, they had

been among the most active of the persecutors of the Dalton family, and the instigators of the efforts to ruin Ned.

As soon as the doctor pronounced Fagan's illness to be cholera the rest of the inhabitants of the house fled in terror. The poor sufferer was left absolutely alone; even his wife forsook him in his agony. The tidings were brought to Mrs. Dalton early, by a neighbour who presented herself, ostensibly to buy a bundle of wood, in reality because she wished to be the first to tell the news.

"What!" cried Mrs. Dalton, shocked at the cruelty of Mrs. Fagan. "Do you mean to tell me that there is no one with the poor man?"

"Bless you, no! Who was a-goin' to stop and get the cholera? Not very likely. His wife's come to my room, poor dear. It's to give her a drop of summat comfortin' I wants the wood."

"Then please tell her that I am gone to nurse her husband," said Mrs. Dalton quietly.

The woman stared in amazement, doubting whether she heard aright.

"*You!*" she cried. "Why, them Fagans has done you more bad turns nor any of us!"

"I know that; but my Master tells me to forgive, as He has forgiven me."

"Now, my good soul, don't you go for to do it," remonstrated the neighbour. "You can't do him no good, poor thing, and like enough you'll catch the cholera, and then what'll become of your children?"

"I do not think I am likely to have the cholera,

I'm not afraid. But that will be as God pleases. If He takes me from my children He will care for them. I can't leave a fellow-creature to die all alone, and without trying to help him."

The woman was too much surprised to remonstrate further, and went away muttering, "Well, if ever I heerd the likes o' that!" She hurried home to impart the intelligence, and the news spread like wild-fire. When Mrs. Dalton crossed the court to Mrs. Fagan's house the neighbours crowded to doors and windows, staring at her in silent wonder; but the sick man's wife was not shamed into returning to her duty.

As soon as Mrs. Dalton had been left alone she made some tea and forced herself to eat a good meal, aware that her duty was to run no undue risks. Then she sent her little girls to school, told Tom to go and tell Mr. Barton what had happened, and went to take her place at the sick man's bedside. He lay on a shake-down of dirty straw and old sacks, and his only covering was a filthy, ragged blanket.

Mrs. Dalton had never before seen a case of cholera, and was horror-struck at the sight of the distorted, blue-tinged countenance of the sufferer. His groans and cries were piteous, and such oaths fell from his lips as made the listener shudder. She fetched pillows and a warm blanket from her own bed, and did all in her power to relieve the agony which it wrung her heart to witness, praying silently meanwhile that the poor sinner might find mercy. She soon found that the poor man's bodily pangs were aggravated by his terror at the thoughts of death, and whenever

he was able to listen she spoke to him of Jesus Christ, whose blood cleanseth from all sin, and from time to time repeated such passages of Scripture as seemed to her suitable, or prayed aloud for pardon and mercy. She often said afterwards that she felt as though she had never really prayed before, while she cried to God for the sinful soul so soon to pass into eternity.

When the doctor came he was surprised to see a neat, clean woman by the bedside, instead of the dirty slattern who had been there when he paid his former visit. He asked Mrs. Dalton if she was a nurse.

"No, sir," she replied; "I am only a neighbour; but I could not bear the poor man to be alone."

"Are you aware of the risk you run?"

"Yes, sir; but I have no fear for myself."

The doctor glanced at the calm face and said, "I suppose, then, that you have trusted your own soul to Christ for salvation?"

"Yes, sir, through God's mercy, I know I am safe."

The doctor held out his hand to her. "God bless you," he said, "and give you this soul for your hire."

"Is there *no* hope, sir?" asked Mrs. Dalton sadly.

"None—for this world; he has already begun to sink," was the reply.

Mr. Barton came directly he received Mrs. Dalton's message, and prayed aloud for the dying man, who grew rapidly worse. Before the power of speech utterly failed the sufferer was heard to murmur, "God be merciful." These were his last words. He died a few hours later, his wife being present at the time.

She, too, had been taken ill, and the neighbours to whom she had fled on the morning having refused to shelter her any longer, the poor suffering woman had no alternative but to return to her own miserable home.

Mrs. Dalton got her to bed at once, and sent for the doctor, who pronounced her illness to be cholera, although in a milder form than the other.

The poor woman had acute pain to bear for several hours, but then symptoms of amendment appeared, and although she was very ill for some days, she recovered her health eventually.

One day when the worst was over, and Mrs. Fagan was in a fair way of recovery, she said to her kind nurse—

"How came you to come to look after my poor man; and what for do you be so good to me?"

"I came because I thought my Lord and Master would wish me to do it."

The woman looked at her curiously for a moment, and then said—

"Do you know all the bad things I've done to you, and how I have hated you?"

"Yes, I knew all that," was the quiet reply.

"*And yet you came!*"

The tears were now falling fast down the poor wan face, which wore an expression of softness very unusual to it.

"You don't know half how bad I've been to you. But I'll just tell you, and then if you forgive me I shan't be afraid to ask God to forgive me now."

"You needn't be afraid to ask God to forgive you, whatever you've done," said Mrs. Dalton tenderly, stroking the toil-worn hand she held in hers. "If you could know all He has forgiven me, you wouldn't be a bit afraid. You see, He just *loves* to forgive poor sinners for the sake of His dear Son who died upon the cross to save us. He is always waiting to be gracious, and He promises that He will remember our sins no more. He blots them out in the blood of Jesus which cleanseth from all sin. So go and tell Him all you've done. I'll tell you a short prayer you can say out of the Bible—'Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.'"

Mrs. Fagan listened with an eager look on her face, nd repeated after Mrs. Dalton, "Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow."

There was silence for a few minutes; then the sufferer said, in a faltering voice—

"I think I'd just *like* to tell you all the bad things I've done. I shall feel happier-like if you know, though I'm afeard you'll hate me, and perhaps go away and leave me alone."

"No, I won't leave you; that I promise," said Mrs. Dalton, pitying the wistful look in the sick woman's eyes.

There is no need to detail all that Mrs. Fagan told, in her own words. She confessed how she had planned to steal the Daltons' food, hoping to drive the widow to extremity, and force her to open her shop on Sunday again.

Before all was told the widow felt that she did

indeed need strength from on high to enable her to forgive the malicious cruelty which had plotted to ruin her boy's soul. Mrs. Fagan's tale made clear much that had before puzzled her. She now understood what had made poor Ned behave so strangely, and her heart ached for him.

The author of all the trouble seemed really penitent. "I think," she said, "that it is not too late to save Ned, if you could get him right away from his bad companions. Perhaps Parson could get him a place somewhere away, for he's a genteel-looking lad, and smart-like in his ways."

Mrs. Dalton was sorely tempted to go off at once to the clergyman; but she felt that to do so would be selfish, and resisted the temptation. And while she was quietly performing the duty that came to her hand, the God whom she trusted was working for her; as she found when she was able to leave her patient without fear of injury, and turn her steps to Mr. Barton's house.

The good pastor had not forgotten Ned; and when the poor widow, full of trouble, told her story, he said kindly—

"Never fear that we shall be able to rescue the lad. Did you not tell me that he has a fancy for the sea?"

"Yes, sir; indeed, he has more than once threatened to run away to go to sea."

"Then all will be well. Ned shall have his wish, and have it respectably. A friend of mine, who knows all about the lad from me, has been inter-

esting himself to get him into the navy; and I have to-day heard that he has been successful. How old is Ned?"

"Thirteen, sir, last week."

"Then see how things work together. Thirteen is the age at which boys are received into the training-ship. So Ned can be at once removed from all evil associations. And in the navy he will be subjected to just that sort of discipline which is so beneficial to a high-spirited boy like him. I have no doubt it will prove his salvation."

As Mrs. Barton spoke the widow's thoughts went back to the many instances in which, since her husband's death, God's loving care had been manifested.

"Oh, sir," she cried, "how wonderful it is to think that all this time my heavenly Father has been working for me and mine, and I mistrusting Him so all the time!"

"We are all sadly apt to dishonour God in that way," said Mr. Barton. "But, as Christians, we ought to have no anxious forebodings, but to be ever calm and peaceful in the assurance that as God has, by His grace, enabled us to seek first His kingdom and righteousness, He will not let us want for any temporal blessing that is good for us. 'My God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus.' 'No good thing will He withhold from them that walk uprightly.'"

CHAPTER XI.

CONFESSION.

"He that covereth his sins shall not prosper: but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy."—*Proverbs* xxviii. 13.

WHEN Ned heard from his mother of the plan that was afoot to give him his desire, and to save him from his evil companions, he looked quite dazed for a minute; then, throwing himself on his knees, he buried his face in his mother's lap and burst into tears.

"Oh, mother!" he sobbed, "I've been so unhappy, and so bad; you don't know, not half!"

"Tell me, my boy," said his mother softly, as she smoothed his curly hair. "You'll feel ever so much better if you tell me, and then, perhaps, I can help you. I've seen that my Ned was in trouble many a time of late."

Thus encouraged, Ned poured out the tale of his sin and his sorrow.

"Oh, mother, I am that thankful, I don't know how to say, that I'm a goin' away! I should never

a got clear of Dick Fagan if I'd 'ad to stop 'ere. I suppose as 'ow it's God as did it for me; and don't you think He must mean to save me, mother, a givin' me this chance? Do you think He will forgive me, mother? Or 'ave I been too bad?"

"No sin is so great but that the blood of Jesus can wash it away, Ned. But you know it was not only to put away our sins that Jesus died—not only to save us from hell, but also to save us from its power, and make us holy, like Himself. Those who have Him as a Saviour, must also take Him as their King, whose commands they obey. Are you ready to do *that*, Ned?"

"If I thought as 'ow God would forgive me, I think I should *want* to serve and please Him; I do, really, mother."

"Then, Ned, you ought to understand why I feel that I cannot sell on Sunday now. It is because I love to do what He commands me."

"But I thought you was always good. You and father always taught us to obey God; and yet you began to sell o' Sundays."

"I'll tell you how that was, Ned. I wasn't like your father, who loved God above everything. I loved my husband and children more than I loved God; and so, when I was afraid want was coming, I couldn't trust God to provide—I didn't really believe His promises. But now it is different. I love God so much for having forgiven me my sins that I cannot bear to do what grieves Him, and I like to keep His commandments. Do you see what I mean?"

"Yes, mother. I know how that feels; for I've often felt awful bad when I thought how sorry father would be to know as I stole, and went about with bad chaps a-pickin' pockets and the like. Not that *I* did it, mother; but I went and looked on. And I don't think I'd ever 'ave stole, only they said I was a 'mammy-sock,' and I couldn't bear that."

"That was because you did not love and fear God, my boy."

"But, mother, don't you mind when folks says nasty things about your shuttin' shop o' Sundays?"

"I mind very much, Ned; so much that I couldn't bear it if it weren't that I just tell God how it hurts me, and He helps me to bear it."

Ned looked up wonderingly as he asked—

"Can we go and pray about such things as that?"

"Why, yes, my boy! You see, God loves us so very much that nothing that concerns us is beneath His notice. I tell Him everything that troubles me—no matter how little a thing. It is so happy to be able to do that, Ned, you can't think."

"And arn't you afeard of havin' to go to the workhouse, mother?"

"Not now. If it should be God's will to send me there, He will help me to be content. But I don't think He will, for He gives me health to work, and gives me work to do. Then see how He has sent me help when I was in trouble. And now, here He sends this chance for you to go to sea, just when you want to do right."

Ned was silent for a little while, then, looking up shyly, he said—

"Mother, what ought I to do about the money the gentleman gave me? I've got it all safe."

"That's one thing I wanted to talk to you about, Ned. You know the Bible says, 'If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins.' That is confession to God. But when we have sinned against our fellow-creatures, we must confess to them too. 'Confess your faults one to another,' St. James says. Do you understand what I mean, my boy?"

"Oh, motl er, must I do that?" said Ned huskily.

"You will do it, my boy, if you are *really* sorry."

"Then I'll go, mother, now. I'd rather go at once, if I must go at all."

"That's my brave Ned. I'll come with you."

"Oh, mother, you'll be so tired. It's an awful long way."

"I'll manage it, dear. If I'm very tired, we can get a 'bus for once, coming back. But we must go now, because I've got to go to poor Mrs. Fagan soon."

Mother and son started on their mission. When they reached the house, Mrs. Dalton waited outside when Ned was let in, which, at first, the footman seemed inclined to refuse. But Mrs. Dalton said, in her gentle, refined voice—

"Please ask the gentleman to see my boy. It is somethin' very particular."

"Won't you step inside and sit down, missus?" the man asked civilly, when it was decided to admit Ned.

But Mrs. Dalton preferred to wait outside, for she wanted the boy to tell his own tale.

Poor Ned's heart beat so fast that he found difficulty in answering the gentleman's question—

"Well, my lad, what do you want with me?"

"Please, sir, I came to bring back this," said the boy huskily, turning red and white by turns, as he held out a half-sovereign.

The gentleman looked surprised. "I do not understand you, my lad."

"Please, sir, it's a half-suvrin as you gave me in mistake, when I carried your bag, three weeks ago."

"Well, if I gave you half a sovereign, it certainly was a mistake; but I did not know I had done so. And how is it you bring it to me *now?*" said the gentleman kindly, with a keen look at Ned, who coloured under his gaze, but told him all the truth about the matter. "Thank God, my lad, for giving you so good a mother. Thank Him, too, that He has helped you to be so brave as to come and tell me the truth. Had you not done so, it would always have been upon your conscience, and you would have despised yourself. Now, I have no doubt that this will be a turning-point in your life. Let it be so, my dear lad. If you seek for grace and strength from on high, you are sure to get it. You know who promised, 'Him that cometh unto Me, I will in no wise cast out'?"

"Yes, sir," said Ned shyly, as he rubbed the back of his hand across his eyes to hide the tears which unbidden, started to them.

"Well, now, where's this good mother of yours? I should like to have a little talk with her."

"She's waitin' outside, sir. She wouldn't come in."

The gentleman sent for Mrs. Dalton, and, after some conversation with her, rang the bell, and ordered cold meat and bread to be brought. He then left mother and son together, telling them to make a good meal.

After a short absence he returned to his study, and said to Ned—

"Now, my boy, I shall not give you back the half-sovereign. I think it better for you that I should not do so. Here is the sixpence you earned by carrying my bag, and money to pay for an omnibus to take you home, for your mother does not look fit to walk back."

Mrs. Dalton gratefully accepted the proffered kindness, and she and Ned departed.

A few days later the boy received orders to present himself for medical examination, previous to his admission into the navy. The doctor, to whom he presented himself, examined him thoroughly, and found he had no bodily ailments, and that his sight was good. "However," he said, "you want some good nourishing food, and the life at sea will soon make you strong."

The time passed quickly until Ned's last day at home arrived. In the evening he went to see Mr. Barton, who prayed with him, gave him much valuable advice, and presented him with a Bible in a clear type, strongly bound, with references and maps.

In the Bible the boy's name was written, and the text, "Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way? By taking heed thereto, according to Thy word."

Ned sat up late, talking to his mother, whose heart yearned over this her first child to go out into the wide world to start for himself.

"Try never to forget your prayers, Ned dear," she said. "Among a large number of boys, there will certainly be some who will laugh at you for praying; but you must brave that. Never be ashamed of your colours, my boy. Remember what God says, 'Them that honour Me, I will honour.' If once you neglect your prayers, you will be sure to go wrong."

"I will try, mother," said Ned earnestly. "I will pray morning and evening, and I'll learn a text every day from my Bible that Mr. Barton gave me, as I do for you now."

"That will be very nice, dear. And never forget that God is always ready to hear our prayers. At any moment, if you are in trouble or temptation, you can lift up your heart and cry, 'Lord, help me!' There are many short prayers in the Bible which you can use. 'Hold Thou me up, and I shall be safe,' and 'Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow,' are two I often use myself. Always remember, too, Ned, that your mother is praying for you, and that the greatest joy she could have would be that of knowing that her children were serving God faithfully."

Ned had to start very early the next morning. His mother and Tom went to see him off by the coach, and stood watching as long as it was in sight.

All mothers will understand what Mrs. Dalton felt on parting with Ned, who was all the dearer to her for the sorrow he had caused her. But though she was sad, her heart was full of thankfulness to God for so graciously helping her in the time of trouble.

We cannot follow Ned in his life at sea, and must leave him for a time altogether, though more will be heard of him before this tale is ended.

After his departure things went on quietly for some time at the little shop. Tom had given such satisfaction at his place that his master raised his wages to five shillings a week. Charlie was still at Mr. Barton's. He had been taught by his mother to be thorough in his work, whatever it was, and being an obedient boy, as well as good-natured and obliging, he won golden opinions from the cook, who was very kind to him.

Mrs. Dalton had very little custom at her shop, for the generality of the neighbours held to their expressed determination of "dealing with those who would oblige them on Sundays." But active persecution had ceased. Mrs. Fagan, loud in her professions of gratitude to Mrs. Dalton, was careful to make it understood that she took the family's part; and, as her temper was proverbial, few cared to provoke it, although the change in her character was sufficiently manifest to excite considerable surprise. She, who had been notorious for her foul language, was never heard to swear; and she would stand a considerable amount of ridicule without retorting.

I may tell here how this poor creature, who, for nearly fifty years, had been an enemy to God, and

wholly given up to the service of Satan, became a humble follower of the Lamb, and in time came out very decidedly upon the Lord's side, going in and out among her late associates as a very missionary. She once told Miss Spencer that Mrs. Dalton's quiet Christian conduct and patient endurance of ill-treatment first made her believe in religion.

"You see, miss, she never preached at us; but she stuck fast to what she felt was right, and was always a-doin' something kind for one and another, no matter how bad we behaved to her. Then when she went to look after my poor man, when I'd left him alone becos I was that afeard o' the cholera, and afterward was so good to me, I were broken down like. Then she talked and talked of how Jesus Christ died to save sinners, and kep' a-telling me as how He wanted to save me. And when I thought as I was too bad, and told her as how I didn't dare to go to Him, and neither didn't know how, she told me about a poor woman who had been dreadful bad, like me, who went to Jesus Christ when He lived in the world, and how He just forgave her everything. And then she said a hymn to me. I can't remember it all, but there's some lines I like so—

'Nothin' in my hand I bring,
. . . . . .
Wash me, Saviour, or I die.'

That seemed just what I wanted, miss; for I had got nothin' to bring, and I wanted to be washed. So I put it into a prayer like, and I often say, 'Wash me, Saviour, or I die.' And I do believe as how God has

forgiven me, for all I've been such an awful wicked woman. And, oh dear, miss, I do so want to tell the neighbours and my poor boy, as I've taught to be bad, what a lovin' Saviour the Lord Jesus is."

As may be imagined, this poor woman had plenty to bear when her change of mind was known. At first one and all refused to believe anything about it, and contented themselves with trying to laugh her out of "her new fancy," as they called it; but when they found that ridicule had no effect she was subjected to hot persecution. But, like Mary Magdalene, out of whom seven devils had been cast, she loved much because much had been forgiven, and, upheld by the mighty power of God, she went boldly in and out, telling "what a dear Saviour she had found," and entreating others to be "reconciled to God."

Once it was suggested to her to change her abode, so as to escape the ill-treatment she received; but she answered, "No. I worked hard here for the devil for many years; let me stay and try to do summat for God."

Her great sorrow was her son Dick, to whom, from his birth, she had been "his counsellor to do wickedly," and she agonized in prayer for him. It was long before the answer came; but at length this poor depraved lad was brought to the feet of Jesus, and the day came when he was seen sitting beside his mother in a quiet corner of the church, drinking in the Gospel message, while tears of thankful joy streamed down his mother's face.

CHAPTER XII.

DARK DAYS.

"He who has helped me hitherto
Will help me all my journey through;
And give me daily cause to raise
New Ebenezers to His praise."

A COLD, wet autumn was followed by an unusually severe winter. The close, stifling courts, with which some parts of London abound even now, became more unhealthy than ever, and there was great distress abroad. Influenza was rife, proving almost as dire a scourge as the much-dreaded cholera.

In the court in which Mrs. Dalton lived the disease became an epidemic, whole families being prostrated by it. The widow went in and out among her neighbours constantly. Wherever her presence could afford help or comfort, there she was to be found acting the part of an unpaid sick-nurse. This went on for some weeks; but at last her services could be no longer generally bestowed, being required in her own home on account of her children's illness.

Tom was the first to fall ill, just before Christmas, but he soon recovered sufficiently to return to his work; then Charlie and the little girls were laid up. "There was no danger except from weakness" the doctor said; but their illness was lingering, and what with nursing them, and working far on into the night to obtain means to provide her sick children with nourishment, the poor mother was sadly overdone, and at last she broke down.

At first she supposed that she had taken cold, and she struggled for several days against growing illness. But one morning, towards the end of January, Tom heard a feeble voice call him as he passed his mother's room to go downstairs. He went to her, and even his unpractised eye could see that she was very ill. Her eyes were sunken, yet unnaturally bright; her face was flushed, and she breathed with difficulty.

"Oh, Tom dear," she panted, "I am so ill. I can't get up. Whatever shall I do?"

"I'll get you a cup of hot tea as quickly as possible, mother—that'll do you good," said Tom.

Mrs. Dalton eagerly swallowed the tea which Tom brought her, but it gave her no relief; and it was many a long day before any simple remedies did her good. The life of trial and privation to which she had been subjected for so long had undermined her constitution, and when serious disease attacked her she had no strength to resist it.

Tom begged to be allowed to fetch his little sister to be with his mother. She longed to accede to his proposal. It would have been the greatest comfort to

have her little girl about her, for, young as she was, Mary was a good nurse. Nurses are *born*, not *made*, and little Mary had early proved herself a born nurse. She seemed to know by instinct what was wanted by an invalid, and was an adept in the art of shaking up pillows, and so placing them as to afford the greatest rest and ease. Her father had often said that his "little Moll" would have nursed him as efficiently as her mother did, had she been possessed with equal strength. But greatly as Mrs. Dalton longed for her child's presence she would not summon her, for it was one of her greatest comforts to feel that the child was not exposed to the contamination of associating with low people.

Jennie Dalton was a true mother; she lived for her children, ever placing their well-being and comfort before her own. And she had her reward, as all such mothers do sooner or later. The time always comes when the children of really good, unselfish mothers realize all they owe to their parent, and repay the debt with love if they cannot do it any other way.

Tom did his best for his mother. He made the place tidy, gave the little girls their breakfast, and saw them off to school. He wanted to fetch the doctor, but to that his mother also objected. She hoped to get better, and was adverse to troubling the good doctor, in whose debt she was deep already, although he never sent her any account. But before Tom returned home to his dinner the matter was taken out of the sick woman's hands, and Mrs. Fagan was installed as head nurse.

Tom's face showed the surprise which he did not like to express in words when he found a basin of steaming soup and a hot potato put ready for his dinner, and Mrs. Fagan busy stirring something over the fire.

Mrs. Fagan answered Tom's look with the remark, "You see, it's *my* turn now, Tom. Your mother was that good to me when I was bad, and I means to do what I can for her now."

"It's very kind of you," said Tom heartily. "Do you think mother'll be better to-morrow?"

"No, I don't," she answered bluntly. "Not to-morrer, nor a good many to-morrers atop of it."

"Why—what's the matter with her?" Tom asked.

"Fever," said the woman shortly.

"Did mother send for Dr. Masters? She wouldn't let me go for him."

"No, I fetched him my own self, as soon as I seed her poor face. Now, don't take on, Tom. If she don't get well it shan't be my fault. I ain't a bad hand at nussing; and I'll stay and do for you all till your mother is about again. Not but what I'm afeard she won't never get about again," she added to herself. "If ever there were a saint fit for heaven, it's Jennie Dalton, God bless her! And it's my belief the Lord is going to take her out o' this wicked world."

"But how shall you live, if you give up your time to us?" asked Tom presently.

"There, don't you fret yourself about me, there's a good lad. It won't take near all my time to do for you; and my work's only for the slop shops, which

I can do as well sittin' aside your mother as if I was in my own room. It's lonesome, too, there, now my Dick's away a learnin' carpenterin', and I've got no one to do for. I know your mother did ought to have some one better nor me about her; but I love her dearly, that I do, and I'll do my best for her."

"I'm sure it's real kind of you, and I'm much obliged to you," said Tom, as he went to see his mother before going back to his work.

That day began a time of wearing anxiety. Jennie Dalton lay between life and death for days, and the doctor looked very grave. On the second day of her illness she became delirious. At times she talked incessantly, and the kind nurse was often moved to tears when the sick woman's delirious utterances betrayed how sorely she had suffered from the unkind treatment she had endured. But what touched Mrs. Fagan even more was to hear the sufferer speak of holy things; of her assurance that the God who had revealed to her His pardoning love would, in His own good time, appear on her behalf; or when she prayed aloud.

It was a sad time for Tom, who grew daily paler and thinner; for, in spite of Mrs. Fagan's persuasions, he barely took food enough to support him, so anxious was he to save for his mother's sake.

Mr. Barton provided many a comfort for the sick woman; and so she, who of her penury had given to her Lord in the person of her poorer neighbours, was well cared for in her own extremity. But still those who know what sickness is will understand that the

expenses of Mrs. Dalton's illness were heavy, and will enter into Tom's anxiety to save. He knew that the rent was behindhand, and that this would trouble his mother when she knew it; so he got an extra job of work whenever he could, either during his dinner hour or after the shop was closed at night. He also gave up to pay the rent some money he had saved to buy new boots, although his old ones let in water, in consequence of which he was quite crippled by chilblains.

The first week in February was about the coldest of all that winter. One day an icy north wind blew, and snow fell heavily. When Tom went home to dinner some of the neighbours were talking eagerly before the door of the little shop. When Tom appeared they were silent and looked at each other. Tom noticed this, and his heart sank. Quickly he asked a woman he knew if she had heard how his mother was. The slight hesitation in her manner terrified the boy, who was just in the condition of body and mind to imagine the worst.

"Is mother dead?" he asked in sudden agony.

"No, no," came the hasty answer. "There's nought so bad as that; but I'm afeard she's very bad. Mrs. Fagan, she ran out in a fuss like, to ask me to run for the doctor. He's there now."

Tom leaned against the door-post, sick at heart. In a little while the door opened, and the doctor appeared, followed by Mrs. Fagan.

"Then you do think there is some hope, sir?" Tom heard her say.

"Indeed I do. I quite hope she'll pull through,

although she is terribly weak. It depends more upon kitchen physic now than on anything I can do. Give her the tonic every four hours, nurse. Make her take plenty of beef-tea and milk."

Tom did not see that the good doctor put money into Mrs. Fagan's hand to enable her to carry out his wishes; nor did he know that he had brought a jar of strong beef essence prepared by Mrs. Masters. So the poor boy listened sadly to the directions, feeling how impossible it would be to provide his mother with what she needed.

Dr. Masters was far from being a rich man, and he had a rapidly increasing family. A large proportion of his practice was among poor folk, who could not remunerate him for his care and skill on their behalf. But many an act of charity did he do. Many a poor sufferer had reason to pray for blessings upon his head. And Dr. Masters was no exception among the men of his profession. They who go about among the poor know that there is no class of men anywhere who perform so many acts of self-denying charity as do medical men. And yet who ever heard a doctor talk of his good deeds?

Dr. Masters caught sight of Tom, and stopped to speak to him.

"Can you go round to my house, my lad, to fetch some medicine for your mother? I am wanted in a hurry in quite another direction."

"Yes, sir, I can go directly," Tom said huskily.

The tone of his voice was not lost upon the doctor, who said kindly—

"Don't fret, my boy. Please God, we shall bring your mother through this attack. But it would be better for you not to go to her just now, for she would want to talk if she saw you, and she must be kept quiet."

"But she don't know me, sir," said Tom.

"She would know you now. She spoke quite sensibly when I was with her just lately. Be as quick as possible, there's a good lad. Ask to see Mrs. Masters, give her this paper, and bring whatever she gives you."

Tom sped away, and quickly returned with the medicine. All through the afternoon while he was busy at the shop his thoughts ran upon the conversation he had heard between the doctor and Mrs. Fagan, and he worried himself with the idea that by no possible means could he provide for his mother the nourishing things, which Dr. Masters said she really must have. But he found that Mrs. Masters had sent them in the basket which he brought back with him.

As evening came on the weather grew worse. The wind had shifted, and drenching rain succeeded to snow. The streets were in a state of slush almost indescribable, and the wind shrieked dismally as it fought wildly with pedestrians for the possession of their umbrellas. There were no customers at the shoemaker's shop that evening, and soon after eight o'clock Tom's master, who had a bad cold and longed for his fireside, began to think of closing.

"Just move those things from the door, Dalton," he

said, "and then I think we might put up the shutters for to-night."

Tom obeyed, but before his task was completed a tall gentleman, wrapped in a large coat with a cape called a Roquelaire (it was before the days of ulsters or even of Inverness capes), came into the shop, and asked if he could be accommodated with change for a sovereign.

"I want to take a cab, and have only gold," he said.

"I can give you the whole in silver, sir, if you like," said Tom's master.

"Thank you, that will suit me exactly," was the reply.

The change was counted out, and the gold and silver changed hands. Meantime, some remarks were exchanged on the inclemency of the weather.

As the gentleman reached the door he slipped his purse into his coat pocket, as he supposed. But the wind catching his heavy cloak, twisted it round and round his legs and blew his hat off, and, in his struggle, to right matters, he missed his pockets, and the purse fell to the ground unnoticed.

CHAPTER XIII.

AN ORDEAL FOR TOM.

"Leave me not, for flesh is frail,
When fierce trials would assail;
Leave me not in darkened hour,
To withstand the tempter's power."

WHEN all his duties were completed Tom took his departure, and his master locked the shop door behind him. Just as the boy turned to go home, his eye was caught by a glitter on the half-melted snow that lay by the sill of the door in a corner. He stooped to pick it up, and found a purse full of money. Gold coins in great number shone through the silken meshes, and there was a crisp rustle suggestive of bank-notes when the purse was handled.

Tom's heart gave a bound. For the moment his only thought was that the money had been sent to him in his extreme need, and, involuntarily, words of thanksgiving rose to his lips.

"Oh, mother, mother," he cried softly, "now you can have whatever you need. Oh, how glad I am!"

Then he began to wonder where he could spend the money to the greatest advantage for his mother's benefit.

"I'll go and ask Dr. Masters," he said aloud. And, forgetting all about his fatigue and the pain in his feet, he started for the doctor's house.

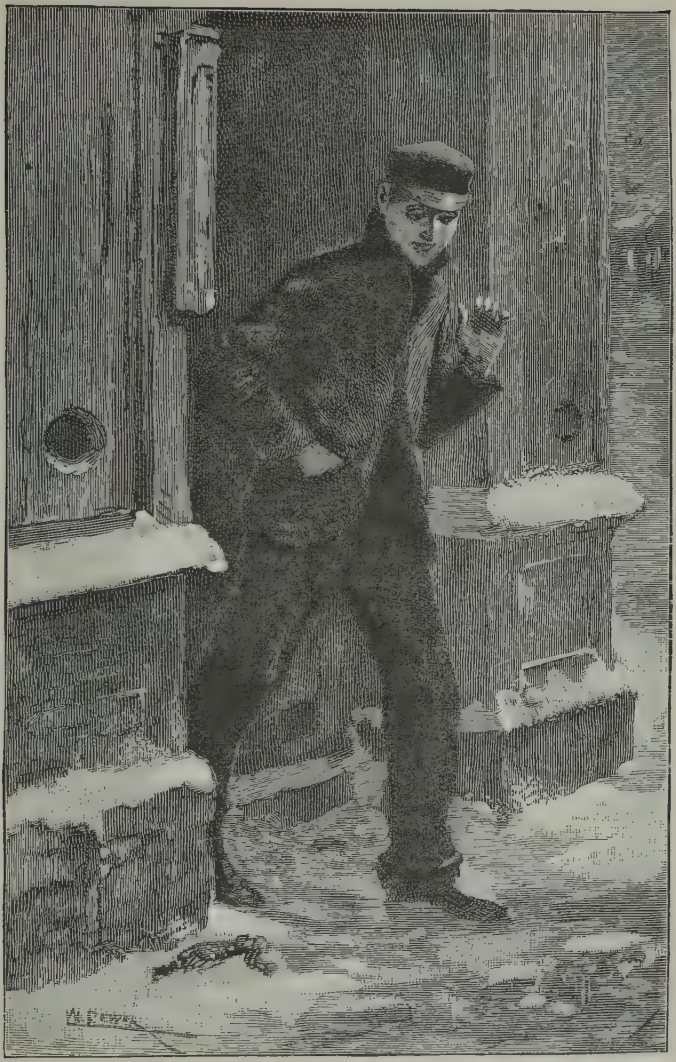
In after years, Tom spoke of it as one of the most striking instances of God's preserving grace that he was prevented appropriating any of the money. He had only taken a few steps towards Dr. Masters' house, when he stopped suddenly.

"I was going to be a thief—a thief!" he gasped. "But, oh, how I wish it was my money!"

"It is yours. You found it. And you do not want it for yourself, but for your sick mother," said the tempter in his heart. "Take just one sovereign, No one will be any the worse."

That was the strongest temptation that ever assailed Tom Dalton either before or after. He was about to take one sovereign from the purse when he turned sharply round. "Who spoke?" he thought, as he looked about. There was not a soul near. No one had spoken. Only the voice of God in his heart said, "Thou, God, seest me," and Tom was saved.

Without giving himself a moment to think, lest he should be tempted afresh, he started off to the nearest police station. It rained more heavily than ever, and when Tom pushed open the door and entered the station house, the water poured off him and made



TOM'S TEMPTATION. *See page* 109.

a pool on the floor. A policeman who had been sitting on a high stool at a desk got upon his feet when Tom appeared. Apparently the weather had affected his temper, for he looked very cross, and said in a surly manner—

"Now then, youngster, what do you want?"

"Please, sir, I've been and picked up a gentleman's purse, and I thought as how I'd better bring it here."

"*Empty*, I suppose, as you're so mighty honest."

"No; it's full," said Tom.

"How do you know it's a gentleman's purse?" said the policeman, who evidently laboured under the impression that he was a very clever person. "How do you know as it isn't a lady's purse? I suppose you picked a gent's pocket, and now are afraid to keep the purse."

"I don't *know* as it's a gent's purse, but I thought it might be, because of where I found it."

"Well, I don't want any more of your palaver. Just hand out the money."

Tom gave him the purse, which he opened.

"Now then, how much have you kept for yourself, eh?" he said, in a would-be facetious manner.

The colour mounted to Tom's face as he recalled his narrow escape from temptation.

"Ah, I thought so," sneered the policeman. "Now then, youngster, turn out your pockets."

"I won't!" cried Tom. "What right have you to call me a thief?"

"Oh, you won't, won't you? We'll see about that,"

cried the policeman, catching hold of the boy, who struggled in his grasp.

Just then a diversion was caused. The station house door was opened, and a gentleman entered.

"Officer," he said excitedly, "I've lost my purse."

"This is the gent as dropped the purse," said Tom. "Ask *him* whether I've took any of his money." And, drawing himself up haughtily, he scowled at the policeman.

The new-comer took in the situation at a glance.

"What's all this about?" he asked, looking from one to another.

"This lad has brought in a purse, sir. I was just a-keeping him till I could find out whether he has taken any of the money," answered the policeman blandly.

"I told you I had not touched the money," cried Tom angrily. "Please, sir, count the money. The police won't believe I ain't a thief."

There was a choking sound in the boy's voice which made the gentleman look at him keenly, and say in a kind voice—

"So you found my purse, my lad, did you? Where did you find it?"

Tom told him where he had picked up the purse, and he exclaimed—

"Dear me! I must have slipped it past my pocket. How careless of me!"

"Do count the money, sir," urged Tom.

"Yes, sir, you'd better," put in the policeman. "I'll keep this young scamp till——"

"Why do you call the lad a scamp?" interrupted the gentleman sharply. "Such an act as this goes far from proving him a scamp."

It was now the policeman's turn to colour.

"You see, sir, I know these fellows of old."

"Do you?" asked the gentleman quietly, pressing his hand on Tom's shoulder to check the indignant exclamation which rose to his lips. "When was this lad taken up last, and what for?"

His keen, scrutinizing glance made the policeman uncomfortable, and he answered confusedly—

"Oh, I don't know as he's been here, sir; but there's lots of them boys about, and——"

"I beg pardon, I doubt very much if there are many such honest fellows as this one about. The money is all right."

So saying, the gentleman turned his back upon the policeman, who looked very foolish, and addressed himself to Tom.

"Now, my lad, tell me all about yourself. How came you to bring my purse here without touching the money?"

"Please, sir, I was afraid if I didn't bring it at once I should be tempted to keep it. I was near taking some," said Tom, with heightened colour.

"Oh! And what did you want money for?"

"Please, sir, mother's bad. And I heerd the doctor say as how she must have good nourishing things if she were to get well, and I can't get any. Mother's a widow, sir."

A peculiar expression on Tom's face caused the

gentleman to turn round suddenly, and surprise a sneer on the policeman's face. He said nothing, but gave the man a look which spoke volumes of disapproval, and caused the offender to long to sink into the earth. He then addressed Tom again.

"Who knows you, my lad?"

"Please, sir, our clergyman, Mr. Barton, who lives in Euston Square; and there's our lady."

"And who is 'our lady'?"

"Please, sir, Miss Spencer. She lives in Tavistock Square."

"Very well, my boy. I shall see your clergyman and ask about you."

"Mr. Barton will speak for mother, I'm sure, sir. He has been rare good to us."

"He's good to every one, my lad—I know him well by report. Now take this, and you will hear of me again."

Tom's face glowed as a sovereign was pressed into his hand. "Oh, sir, thank you kindly!" he cried. "Now I shall be able to buy mother some nice things, and she will get well again."

"I'll see that your mother has all she needs to-morrow, my boy. Now, good night. Tell your mother to thank God for a good son."

Tom's eyes glistened. "Mother is always a-thanking God for something or other, sir. She is very good, is mother. But I don't know as they'll let me see her," he said sadly.

"Perhaps she'll be better to-night, my boy. Now

you had better get home quickly. You are wet through."

As soon as Tom was gone, the gentleman turned to the policeman and handed him a card, saying dryly—

"Perhaps you would like to make sure that I have a right to the purse. Do you know that name?"

The man turned pale as he read the name inscribed upon the card, and realized that he had been giving himself airs before Colonel Raymond, who held a post of considerable authority in the police department.

"You see, sir," he stammered, "there are such a set of rascals about that we are forced to be careful."

"But what made you call that boy a scamp, and treat him as you did?"

"I couldn't tell but what he was a bad lot, sir."

"If the boy had not been honest he would not have come here to bring the purse. You behaved like a bully and a coward," said Colonel Raymond severely. "You will get yourself into trouble some of these days, if you are not careful. I will let it pass this time, but let it be a warning to you, officer." So saying, Colonel Raymond took his departure.

The man did not answer his reprimand, but he looked very sulky, and when left alone he muttered—

"I hope I shall catch that young rascal tripping some of these days. If I do, he'll get it hot, or my name isn't Timothy Skeggs!"

Tom made the best of his way home. He was feeling so happy that he was hardly alive to his discomfort in the shape of wet garments, and boots with no soles to speak of. When he got in the

doctor was just leaving Mrs. Dalton's room, and said cheerily—

"Your mother's better to-night, my lad. I quite hope she has turned the corner."

"But about the things you said she was to have, sir; I want to get her some. Is it too late to-night?" asked Tom.

"What do you mean, my boy? I don't understand?"

"I heard you tell Mrs. Fagan to give mother some good jelly, and——"

"Oh, I've seen about that! Why, boy, you're wet to the skin! Go and take those things off at once, or I shall have you on my hands again. Here, Mrs. Fagan, just see to this fellow, will you? Give him a basin of the soup Miss Spencer sent, and see him to bed. I shall be in early in the morning to see how Mrs. Dalton is going on." So saying the hard-worked doctor turned out again into the wind and rain, bent on some other errand of mercy.

Tom begged to be allowed to go to his mother, but Mrs. Fagan was inexorable.

"Not a thing do you do, Tom, till you've got off those clothes, and taken the soup, so look sharp. I don't want the trouble o' nursin' you, I can tell you; neither am I a-goin' to get myself into hot water with the doctor; and he knows how to scold if folks don't do what he bids them. So march, double-quick time!"

The good woman spoke roughly, but Tom knew that she was joking; besides, his common sense told

him that it would be better for him to follow her advice, for he was literally wet through—wet to the bones, as our French neighbours say—and cold in consequence.

When he returned to the kitchen, Mrs. Fagan placed a basin of hot soup before him, saying—

"Take that, there's a good lad; and then you shall go and sit with your mother, while I have a bit o' supper and see about dryin' your clothes. It'll be time for her jelly then, and you can give it her."

"Where did the jelly come from?" asked Tom.

"Why, doctor brought a bottle to-day. Rare and good it is, too. If ever there was a real good gentleman in this world, it is Dr. Masters. He'll hear that blessed 'inasmuch' said to him some of these days, bless him!"

"Inasmuch?" said Tom. "What do you mean, Mrs. Fagan?"

"What, don't you know that—you as has been learnt your Bible so well? It's in the Gospels somewheres. I don't know the words rightly, but it's where it tells about the judgment, and about the sheep bein' on the right hand. The King—that's Jesus Christ, you know—tells them as has been good to their neighbours that He took it as if it was done to Him. I heard Mr. Barton preach about it, and it made me think of your mother. P'r'aps you'd read it, would you, Tom? I'd take it very kind, for I ain't no scholard."

Tom took up the well-worn Bible which had been his father's, turned to St. Matthew xxv. 40, and read,

"Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto Me." Then, at Mrs. Fagan's request, he read the whole passage from the thirty-first verse to the end of the chapter. When he ceased reading, Mrs. Fagan said—

"There, now, Tom; don't you think as how your mother, and the doctor, and Miss Spencer—ay, and Mr. Barton, too—will hear them words said to them some day?"

"Yes," said Tom; "and so will some one else too, I think."

"Oh yes; there's lots as I don't know as 'll hear it, I make no manner o' doubt. But, you see, I knows them as I spoke of," said Mrs. Fagan.

"And so do you know the person I mean, Mrs. Fagan," and Tom smiled at her.

"Who is it? Do tell!" she cried.

"Why, you yourself, of course."

"Me!" almost screamed Mrs. Fagan in her great surprise. "Oh no, Tom"—shaking her head sadly—"*I* shall never hear them blessed words said to me. But it will make me real glad to hear such said to them as deserves them, like them I spoke of does."

"I am quite sure you *will*," said Tom. "Why, look how you came to mother when she took bad; and you would do it for any one else who wanted it. I know you are always doing kind things, only you never talk about it as some do. You would help any one you could, wouldn't you now, and be glad to do it?"

Mrs. Fagan looked thoughtful, and was silent for a few minutes. Then she said slowly—

"Yes, I think I should, because I think my Saviour would like me to be kind to any one."

"Then, Mrs. Fagan, what you do is done for Him, every bit as much as what mother or Dr. Masters does. Don't you see?"

There was a tender light in the poor woman's eyes as she cried with a sort of gasp—

"Oh, Tom, if I could think that! I do believe you're right, too," she added joyfully. "Oh, how happy you've made me!" And, throwing her apron over her head, she sat down and relieved her feelings by having "a good cry."

Surely there was joy in the presence of the angels of God at the sight of this poor woman, who for so many long years had been a scoffer and an open enemy to God, actually weeping for joy at the thoughts of being able to do anything to prove her love to Him who had done such great things for her.

CHAPTER XIV.

TOM BUYS A PAIR OF BOOTS.

"New mercies, each returning day,
Hover around us while we pray;
New perils past, new sins forgiven,
New thoughts of God, new hopes of heaven."

KEBLE.

WHEN Tom went up to his mother's room, Mrs. Fagan gave him an injunction to be quiet.

"Don't talk much to your mother, Tom; and do not tell her anything likely to make her think, lest it should keep her awake. The doctor says as how she must do nought but eat and sleep for a while."

"All right," answered Tom. And though his heart was full, and he longed to tell his mother what had befallen him, and of God's goodness in keeping him back from sin, he kept his own counsel. After he had kissed his mother, and told her how happy it made him to know that she was better, he sat quietly by her bedside, holding her wasted hand. Presently she said feebly—

"Tom, dear, could you say a hymn to me? My head is so weak now that I do not seem able to remember."

"Yes, mother. What shall I say?"

"I do not much care what it is, so long as it's about Jesus," she answered faintly. "I seem to long to hear His name."

Tom thought for a moment, then in a low but distinct voice repeated some verses which his father was very fond of—

"My hope is built on nothing less
Than Jesus' blood and righteousness;
I dare not trust the sweetest frame,
But wholly lean on Jesu's name.
On Christ, the solid Rock, I stand,
All other ground is sinking sand.

"When darkness veils His lovely face,
I rest on His unchanging grace;
In ev'ry high and stormy gale,
My anchor holds within the veil.
On Christ, the solid Rock, I stand,
All other ground is sinking sand.

"His oath, His covenant and blood,
Support me in the sinking flood;
When ev'ry earthly prop gives way,
He then is all my hope and stay.
On Christ, the solid Rock, I stand,
All other ground is sinking sand.

"When He shall come with trumpet's sound,
Oh! may I then in Him be found,
Dressed in His righteousness alone,
Faultless to stand before the throne!
On Christ, the solid Rock, I stand,
All other ground is sinking sand."

As Tom began the hymn his mother gently pressed

his hand, which he understood to be a sign that the words were what she wished for.

Presently Mrs. Fagan appeared, bringing some beef-tea for the invalid, and sat down quietly to listen. When Tom's voice ceased she said—

"That's a rare pretty hymn, Tom; and there's one we sang in church last Sunday which I like so much, only I can't remember it. It's about being forgiven a deal, and loving a deal because we're forgiven. Do you know it?"

"I do," whispered the sick woman. "So do you, Tom dear, I think. It begins 'Because, O Lord, Thou lovedst us.'"

"Oh yes, I remember, mother," said Tom—

"Because, O Lord, Thou lovedst us
With everlasting love;
Because Thou gav'st Thy Son to die
That we might live above.
Because when we were heirs of wrath
Thou gav'st us hopes of heaven.
We love because we much have sinned,
And much have been forgiven."

"That's it," cried Mrs. Fagan joyfully. "I do like them words. I say, Tom, couldn't you read us some prayers out of the Prayer-book before we go to bed?"

"Yes, do, Tom dear," said his mother. "Read the one father so often used at evening prayers."

Tom knelt down and reverently repeated this beautiful collect—

"Almighty God, the Fountain of all wisdom, who knowest our necessities before we ask, and our ignorance in asking; we beseech Thee to have com-

passion upon our infirmities; and those things, which for our unworthiness we dare not, and for our blindness we cannot ask, vouchsafe to give us, for the worthiness of Thy Son Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen."

As Tom's lips uttered the words with which he was so familiar, he felt that something was different in them, though what it was he did not then know. In after years he understood that then for the first time in his life he really prayed from his heart.

It was long before his eyes closed in sleep that night, for he was much excited by the events of the evening. Again he thought over the strong temptation that had beset him, and his heart overflowed with thankfulness that he had been kept back from a sin which would have overshadowed his life.

This was an important crisis in Tom Dalton's life. The voice of God in his soul was saying, "My son, give Me thine heart;" and his heart being opened to receive it, he cried, "My Father, be Thou the Guide of my youth."

When he awoke the next morning he could not at first remember what had happened, although sure that it was something out of the common. Then the sight of the sovereign on the chair by his bedside recalled to his mind all the incidents of the past evening. He dressed quickly and knelt to his prayers in a very different frame of mind to that in which he ordinarily performed what he had felt to be an irksome duty, which yet he dared not omit.

When he went downstairs he found Mrs. Fagan already busy over the household concerns. The fire

was lighted, and she was about to fill the kettle. Tom took it from her, saying—

"Let me do that. It is too heavy for you to lift, and you look so tired."

"Thank you; you're a kind lad, Tom. I'm not partickler tired, but I didn't sleep very much. But, I say, Tom, are these the only boots as you've got? The soles is nearly worn off. No wonder you've got such chilblains."

"They're all I've got now. I had to take to my Sunday ones a good bit ago, and mother hasn't been able to get me any more, what with the little ones being ill and that; and I do wear my boots out so fast."

"You're always on your feet, you see. Look here, I've got a little bit o' money. It ain't much, but it'll buy you boots, and you're kindly welcome to it. Do take it."

The poor woman who was so willing to give her little all to help another's need did not mention that she had two pounds put by, but had spent all but a few shillings in buying necessaries for the comfort of her sick neighbour. It never occurred to her that she had done a praiseworthy action.

"How good you are, Mrs. Fagan!" cried Tom gratefully. "I don't know what mother would do without you, that I don't; but I'm not a-going to take your money, so that's all about it."

"We'll see about that, Tom; but come and get your breakfast now. I've given the little ones their bread-and-milk in bed as it is such a cold day."

While Tom and Mrs. Fagan were at breakfast, there was a knock at the door, and the doctor appeared.

"You're an early visitor, sir," said Mrs. Fagan, rising.

"Yes. I've been out all night, and as I was passing I thought I'd look in. How is Mrs. Dalton?"

"She's a bit better, I think, sir; but terrible weak, that she is."

"We must expect that," said the doctor. "Can you give me a cup of tea before I go upstairs? I feel rather faint, and your tea smells nice."

"It's real good tea, sir. Miss Spencer brought it," answered Mrs. Fagan, as she drew an armchair close to the fireside for the doctor, who was quickly provided with tea and a slice of toast.

"Sit down and go on with your own breakfast, good people, or I shall not be comfortable," said Dr. Masters kindly; and when Mrs. Fagan and Tom complied with his express wish, he chatted pleasantly.

"I've got a whole sovereign, sir, as a gentleman gave me," said Tom to the doctor. "And if there's anything that you would like mother to have, I can buy it for her."

"Eh? What did you say?" asked Dr. Masters.

Modestly, but with a glowing face, Tom gave a history of his adventure over-night, not hiding that he had been tempted to keep the purse.

"Thank God, my lad, for keeping you from theft," said the doctor, who had listened with kindly interest to Tom's narrative.

"I have thanked Him, sir," answered Tom shyly.

Here Mrs. Fagan abruptly interposed. Holding up Tom's boots, she cried—

"Do look at these boots, please, sir. They're all Tom has, and his feet are a sight for chilblains. If he's got money he ought to have boots, I say."

"Chilblains, eh? Just let me see them, my lad," said Dr. Masters.

The boy drew off his socks and displayed his feet. The doctor gave a little whistle.

"Chilblains, indeed! Why, how have you walked, with your feet in this condition?"

The feet were a sight. Black and blue in parts, scarlet in others, and there were deep sores on the toes. Dr. Masters proceeded to dress them with some lint and ointment from a little case that he always carried about with him, for among the poor people there were many that needed immediate attention.

"You will be more comfortable now," said the doctor, "and I can find you some boots to wear at present, for you cannot wear new ones for some time. But you must have a new pair when your feet are better. Can you go round to my home with a note?"

"I'm afraid I mustn't go now, sir. I should be late at the shop, and perhaps lose my place."

"I'll manage to set that right for you. I'm going past your master's shop, and I will look in and speak to him."

While he was speaking, Dr. Masters wrote a few lines on a page of his pocket-book, which he tore and folded, and gave to Tom.

"Take this to Mrs. Masters," he said, "and she will give you the boots. Now, Mrs. Fagan, I will see my patient, please."

When the doctor left Mrs. Dalton's house several of the neighbours were waiting about, and a man stepped forward, cap in hand, and, accosting him civilly inquired after Mrs. Dalton.

"She's better this morning, and I hope will pull through now; but she's had a narrow escape, and must be kept very quiet," said Dr. Masters.

"I'm very glad as she's a bit better, that I am, for there's many would miss her if she were taken, sir," replied the man, who had been one of the widow's most bitter enemies at one time; but, having been won by her great Christian behaviour under persecution, was now her staunch supporter.

Tom got his boots, and very comfortable he found them. He was nearly an hour late in reaching the shop, but, thanks to the doctor's kindness, his master was quite affable, and told the boy that had he known of his trouble about boots he should have let him have a pair cheap. Tom thanked him, but felt pleased that he had the money by him to pay for the serviceable and neat boots which he selected for himself and carried off in triumph.

CHAPTER XV.

FRESH FRIENDS.

"Art thou stricken in life's battle? Many wounded round thee moan;
Lavish on their wounds thy balsams, and that balm shall heal thine own."

COLONEL RAYMOND did not forget his promise to Tom. Early on the morning after the loss and recovery of his purse, he called upon Mr. Barton, and, having made known his errand, found that the lad's story was true in every particular.

Colonel Raymond was a very rich man, whose name was well known as foremost in every good work. When quite young he had seen a great deal of service with his regiment, and had so distinguished himself as to obtain rapid promotion. He had retired from the army, and now lived in the country for the sake of his little Daisy—his only living child—who was the very apple of his eye.

He had known sorrow, having lost several children, and his wife, who died when little Daisy was a few hours old. But he did not make a selfish moan over his treasures, who had been removed into far safer keeping than his own. There was no rebellion in his heart, though only his God and himself knew how great was his desolation when the loved companion of many years, his best helper in all his schemes for the good of those around him, closed her eyes in this world, to open them in the fulness of joy which is at God's right hand. Looking forward with joy to the time when he also should be called to "see the King in His beauty," and again receive the beloved ones lost to him for a while, he thanked God for the child left to him, and set himself to find his happiness in the care of little Daisy, and in working for his Lord in the persons of the many poor and suffering ones around him. He looked upon himself as one of the Lord's purse-bearers, and rejoiced in his wealth as the means of helping those who needed help. And so, cheered by the realization of the Master's presence, and upheld by His guiding hand, he went on his way, full of peace and joy himself, and a blessing to those among whom he dwelt, and the many for whom he laboured.

He lived in a picturesque village in a lovely part of Surrey. It was named Lilyford, because a clear stream crossed the road in the midst of the village, and passed through Colonel Raymond's grounds, where it grew wider and was covered with water-lilies both white and yellow. The stream was too

shallow to require a bridge; pedestrians crossed it on stepping-stones, while carriages drove right through it.

In this village Colonel Raymond had established a school which was his special hobby. He had seen much of the depravity and consequent misery existent in London, and his great desire was to rescue the young of both sexes from their wretched surroundings as early as possible, and to train them in habits of decency and virtue, and in the fear and love of God.

Although not personally acquainted, Colonel Raymond and Mr. Barton knew each other by name, and their chief aim in life being the same made a strong bond of union between them, so that they did not meet as strangers when Colonel Raymond was ushered into the clergyman's study.

The visitor listened with great interest to all Mr. Barton could tell him about the Daltons, and spoke of his desire to help them in some tangible way.

"The purse that lad found contained a large sum of money, and as, but for his honesty, I must have offered a reward for its recovery, I think that I ought to expend a good sum for their benefit."

"Mrs. Dalton would not take money after she is able to work again," began Mr. Barton.

"So I should imagine from what you have told me of her. Besides, it is no real kindness, in my opinion, to pauperize any one. My idea was that I might put the boy forward in life in such a way as to be beneficial to the whole family. I dare say you can advise me in the matter."

"That would be a very real charity, and I think Miss Spencer can help you there. She takes a great interest in Tom, and teaches him in the evenings after he leaves work."

"Who is this Miss Spencer? The lad spoke of her last night as a lady who knew his family."

"She is one of my district visitors, a most earnest and devoted worker, and greatly beloved by the poor. She seems thoroughly to understand the art of making her visits acceptable, and, as I need not tell you, it is by no means all really good people who make good visitors."

"Yes, I know that from experience. A considerable amount of tact is required to avoid taking liberties, which is a fault many ladies fall into in visiting the poor."

"I have heard Miss Spencer make the same remark. She acts upon the principle that 'an Englishman's house is his castle,' however poor he may be; and she never even sits down in any house unless invited to do so. Then she overflows with the milk of human kindness, and has a large stock of patience which enables her to listen sympathetically to the tales of trouble the poor creatures tell her. She often gains admittance to houses from whence others have been repulsed, and so has made for herself many an opportunity of speaking a word in season; whereas, had she been less wise, she would be shut out. She is a wonderful help to me in many ways."

"That lad told me she was ill, and he seemed

doubtful whether she could see me, or I would call upon her to consult her about the Daltons."

"Oh, I think she could see you. I saw her yesterday. She has only had influenza, and is pretty well again now."

"Then I will call upon her. Meantime, I should like to know what you think about my sending some really good nourishing things to the poor woman. The boy seemed to speak as though his mother needed things that it did not lay in his power to get."

"I dare say he did, for the family are very poor, and they have had illness in the house for some time past. Dr. Masters is wonderfully charitable to his poorer patients, and I dare say has supplied some of the immediate necessities. I am always hearing of his kindness from my parishioners."

"Is he a rich man?"

"Far from it; he is a man who works hard, and has a large family to support."

"Then I think the necessary things for this poor woman should not come out of the doctor's pocket, so I will send a hamper to Miss Spencer for her."

A few days later Dr. Masters received a £10 Bank of England note. Whence it came he never could discover, so he received it as a gift sent direct from God in time of need.

Tom little thought, when he was enabled to resist strong temptation, what important consequences would result for others as well as himself; how many, in looking back to that time, would have cause

to say, "Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits."

On the afternoon of the day following that on which Colonel Raymond called on Mr. Barton, he turned his steps to Tavistock Square. A brougham—unmistakably a doctor's—was standing at the door of the house for which Colonel Raymond was bound, and a gentleman came out just as he was about to ring the bell, and, entering the carriage, drove away. Judging rightly that this gentleman was Miss Spencer's medical attendant, Colonel Raymond expected to be refused admittance, but he was at once invited to enter and walk upstairs.

For some reason best known to himself, Colonel Raymond had pictured Miss Spencer as a comely, middle-aged lady, and he was consequently considerably surprised when he entered the room, and a remarkably sweet-looking young woman rose to meet him. Ida Spencer was looking delicate from her recent illness, and she was wrapped in a light white shawl, both of which circumstances added to her youthful appearance.

"Miss Spencer?" said Colonel Raymond in a tone of inquiry.

"Yes, I am Miss Spencer," she answered, as she raised to his face what seemed to him to be the sweetest grey eyes he had ever seen.

"Mr. Barton told me to apply to you for information concerning a family named Dalton," said Colonel Raymond. "He said you knew them all well."

"Oh yes, I know them very well indeed. Mrs.

Dalton has been at death's door, but Dr. Masters tells me that he thinks she has turned the corner now. Still I fear her recovery will be very tedious after such an illness."

"And how will she manage during her convalescence?"

"Oh, we must do the best we can for her. Mr. Barton is very liberal, and Dr. Masters will help."

Ida did not think it necessary to remark that she had given up the idea of a new silk dress, to the purchase of which she had looked forward with girlish pleasure, and intended to devote the sum it would cost to the sick woman's benefit. She acted at all times on the spirit of the injunction, "Let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth."

"I am anxious to help the family myself," said Colonel Raymond, and he told the reason he felt an interest in the Daltons.

Ida had already heard the tale from Dr. Masters, and had jumped to the conclusion that her visitor was the owner of the purse as soon as he spoke of the Daltons. She was only too glad to tell him all she knew about them, and her listener thought her narrative one of the most pathetic he had ever heard.

"Do you think that Tom is suitable for a pupil teacher, to be trained with a view of becoming a schoolmaster himself?" asked Colonel Raymond, when Miss Spencer's tale was concluded.

Ida's face grew radiant with pleasure. "It is the thing of all others that he would like, and just what

he is suited for. But, of course, he knew that he must do what would bring in regular wages. Poor Tom, he has had a hard time."

"Well, I hope that better days are in store for them all. You appear to have done a great deal for them, Miss Spencer."

That lady blushed. "I have had but little in my power," she said, "but that I have been so glad to do. When the widow gave up Sunday trading for conscience' sake I was very anxious to prove to her, and to the poor people among whom she dwells, that God does raise up helpers for those who trust in Him. You see, if, in consequence, the family had been obliged to go to the workhouse, the enemies of God would have rejoiced. It was a great trial of the poor woman's faith, for she lost nearly all her customers. And though I was sure that God would provide, we were bound to use the means."

"Certainly. Now, it will be some time before this poor woman can support herself again, so you must allow me to be your banker for her benefit. While she is really unable to work it is quite allowable to give her money. Under these circumstances, I have ordered what is necessary to be sent to you to dispense to her or others, according to your judgment. Then I will ask you to take this, and beg that you will apply to me when you need more. Will you do me this favour?"

"This" proved to be a Bank of England note for ten pounds, like the doctor's, and was most acceptable. Ida almost cried for joy as she reflected how much

comfort this sum would procure for many sufferers besides Mrs. Dalton.

"Oh, Colonel Raymond!" she cried. "How can I thank you for your liberality? I never had so much to give away in my life!"

He smiled at her artless pleasure. "Have you not? Well, you shall often have it in future. God has given me an abundance of this world's goods, and I feel that I am His steward. 'The silver and the gold is the Lord's.' But now about my friend Tom. I will tell you what I have been thinking. I have established schools close to my house, where I have children trained to useful lives. The master is a God-fearing man, and under him Tom could be trained as a schoolmaster. He would live in the master's house, which would be a good home for him in every way, for the wife is a superior, motherly woman. What do you think?"

"It is a most delightful idea!" cried Ida enthusiastically. "My only fear is that Tom is perhaps not sufficiently educated."

"Tell me what he can do, then I shall be able to judge."

Ida gave a list of Tom's acquirements, which elicited the remark from her visitor—

"Come, that is better than I expected. Now, when can you see him to mention my plan?"

"He is coming to me to-morrow evening."

"Then will you hear what he says? I suppose we cannot consult the mother until she is better."

"I suppose not. But she is sure to agree to any plan which meets Mr. Barton's approval."

"Very well. I will call upon you to hear Tom's answer the day after to-morrow, if you will allow me, and we can make final arrangements then," said Colonel Raymond, as he rose to go.

When Tom heard from Miss Spencer of the proposed arrangement for his future, he first stared as if he did not rightly understand what she said, and then he burst into a passion of tears—greatly to the young lady's surprise and discomfiture. She did not know what to do, and in her perplexity she did what was perhaps the best thing she could have done, she left him to himself, and after a little while he grew quite calm. Then she spoke.

"Don't you like the idea, Tom?"

"Oh, miss, it's so unexpected; but I couldn't help myself! It seemed too much all coming at once like."

"But, Tom, I thought you would be so pleased!"

"So I am, miss. It's that made me cry like a baby. It sounds like heaven. I meant that God's goodness seems too much. You see, it seems so wonderful that He should do such great things for me all at once that I felt quite done over like. I hope I shall be able to show Him how thankful I am."

Several days elapsed before the doctor allowed Mrs. Dalton to hear of Tom's good fortune. The change in him she discovered for herself, for the work of grace in his heart was manifest to those who were in daily intercourse with him. The mother's heart was full of joy when she realized that her first-born had set his

face Zionwards. And when she heard what Colonel Raymond was going to do, she felt inclined to exclaim with Tom, "It is too much!"

Just as the trees and hedges began to break into the tender green of spring, Tom Dalton left the close London alley and took up his abode at Lilyford. Before that came to pass much had to be arranged, and Colonel Raymond paid many visits to Miss Spencer, who soon grew to look upon him as an old friend. On one of his visits he brought his little daughter with him. Daisy was a fair, delicate-looking little blossom, with golden hair, and eyes of deep blue. She took a great fancy to Ida, and ever after frequently begged to be taken again to see "the pretty lady."

Tom settled down well to his new work, and improved rapidly under the tuition of his new master, with whom he became a great favourite. Colonel Raymond felt that he had every reason for the satisfaction he felt in looking back to the dismal February evening when he lost his purse and made Tom's acquaintance, thereby taking the first step in the course of events which were destined to have so important an influence upon the lives of the Dalton family, as well as upon his own.

CHAPTER XVI.

SUNSHINE.

"It may be He has waiting
For the coming of my feet,
Some gift of such rare blessedness,
Some joy so strangely sweet,
That my lips can only tremble
With the thanks that would be meet."

BRAINERD.

WE must now return to Ned, of whom Mr. Barton heard frequently through the friend who had got the boy into the navy, and who took great interest in him. The accounts were most satisfactory. "The lad is a born sailor," was the verdict of those in authority over him. He took to his new duties as a duck takes to water, and learnt so quickly the various mysteries with which he needed to be well acquainted, that his instructors were delighted, and declared that he would make a first-class seaman, and might perhaps one day be promoted to a petty officer.

For a little while the strict discipline to which he was subjected was somewhat irksome; but Ned had plenty of good sense, and bound his neck willingly to the yoke from which there was no escape, conscious that the more cheerfully it was borne, the less it would gall him in the wear. He had one fierce trial to endure—the persecution of his companions, who, with few exceptions, set themselves to try to laugh him out of his habit of daily prayer morning and evening. Ned was naturally sensitive, keenly alive to ridicule, and possessed of a strong desire for the approbation of his companions; so, as will be easily understood, the ordeal was a scathing one.

Many a time was he tempted to omit the habit of kneeling to his prayers, thinking that he would say them in his hammock. But he resisted the temptation, and in after years was thankful for the grace which had enabled him to stand firm. After a while it came to be understood that it was of no use jeering at him, and he was left in peace. And not only so, but by his example some timid ones were encouraged to "go and do likewise."

Ned came to be known as a God-fearing lad, who tried to honour his Master in heaven by the faithful performance of daily duty; and as such he was respected, even by those who jeered at him for what they called his "Methodist ways."

While at Portsmouth, Ned wrote to his mother whenever he was able; but when he was drafted to a sea-going ship, and sailed for the East Indies, his letters became a rarity.

Mrs. Dalton's recovery from her severe illness was very slow. The season was unhealthy, and now that her health was feeble the country-born woman suffered much from the atmosphere of the close court, and many a time as she crawled about her house, almost too weak to move, a positive craving for a breath of pure country air came over her. This craving was increased by Tom's rapturous descriptions of his new home, which was a positive revelation of beauty to the boy born and bred in London.

On one occasion he wrote, "Oh, mother dear, how I wish you were here! Mr. and Mrs. Batt are kind as kind to me, but I want my *mother;* and I would like you to see the woods, they are so splendid now. There's primroses and violets and bluebells all over the ground."

"I wish I was there!" sighed poor Mrs. Dalton. "What wouldn't I give to see primroses grown again; but I don't suppose I ever shall;" and she never breathed her longing into human ears.

Charlie Dalton gave great satisfaction in his situation at the clergyman's house, and Mr. Barton determined, as time went on, that he would look out for a better post for the boy, and one likely to be permanent.

An opportunity for carrying out his intention occurred in the summer following Tom's departure for Lilyford. A friend of his, Mr. Marryat, the head of a firm in extensive business as merchants, applied to him to recommend a lad to act as office-boy at his place of business in the city.

"It will," he wrote, "be a good place for a respectable, well-conducted lad, for I would take care that he had proper opportunities for self-improvement by attendance at a night-school in the management of which I assist. He will be required to live at the office to keep the housekeeper company, for she complains of feeling lonely at night. Mrs. Biggs is an old servant in our family, a widow, and a kind Christian woman. Within the last few months she has lost her only child, a boy of fifteen, and I fancy she wants a child to *mother*, for she asked me if the new boy might live with her."

Mr. Barton at once thought of Charlie, and went to speak to Mrs. Dalton on the subject. He then communicated with Mr. Marryat, and Charlie was engaged. Mrs. Biggs came over to see Mrs. Dalton, to whom she promised that she would act a mother's part to the boy. A few days later she came again, and took Charlie back to take up his abode at the office.

And so the widow's three boys were provided for, and her heart glowed with gratitude to the God who had been always so good to her in times of doubt and fear, and had caused light to shine from behind the darkest clouds on her pathway, while He gently led her on step by step, removing difficulties, and crowning her lot with loving-kindness and tender mercies.

Every now and then Mrs. Biggs brought Charlie over on Saturday evening to see his mother. She was very good to the boy, who was growing fast, and as

she said, "getting on famous with his learnin'"; and, in return, Charlie loved her heartily, and called her "Granny."

When Christmas came round, and Charlie had been in his place for six months, Marryat Brothers—as Mrs. Biggs always called her master—suggested to his housekeeper that she should invite Mrs. Dalton and her little girls to spend Christmas Day with her, he himself undertaking to provide a dinner for the occasion.

The invitation being accepted, it was arranged that Mrs. Dalton should take the children over early, that they might all go to the morning service together. This was done; and after dinner Charlie took his sisters into a large room with windows overlooking the river, where they played and enjoyed themselves highly.

Meantime the two women sat together over the fire, chatting pleasantly. For the first time Mrs. Biggs heard the whole of her friend's history, and she listened with the deepest interest while Mrs. Dalton told of how God had appeared to her help "many a time and oft."

"We say it is wonderful, my dear," said good Mrs. Biggs, "because we judge the Lord by ourselves. It *would* be truly wonderful if *we* did such good to those who treated us as we often treat our God. But, bless you, it ain't wonderful for Him. It's only just like Himself. I'm never surprised when I hear of His goodness, for *I know what He is.* I've lived nigh on sixty years, and goodness and mercy have followed

me all the time. He has done great things for you, my dear, as you say, and He'll do greater things yet before He takes you to go home to Him, I don't doubt."

The prophecy of Mrs. Biggs was fulfilled. She did not know when she spoke of any special good likely to befall her friend, and merely spoke from her life-long experience of God's dealings with His children. But there was a great joy in store for Mrs. Dalton; the great desire of her heart was about to be given her.

On the second day of the new year Colonel Raymond called upon Mrs. Dalton to make her a proposal, about which he wished her to think before giving her answer. He told her that the woman who had taken charge of the principal gates at the entrance of his park having died suddenly, he wanted a respectable woman to take up her abode in the lodge, to attend to the gates, and also to take the management of the poultry, and to do the family washing. Having explained so far, Colonel Raymond said—

"Would you like to undertake this situation, Mrs. Dalton? I have been talking to Miss Spencer about it, and she thinks it would suit you, as you understand laundry work. The lodge is quite large enough for you and your little girls—who could attend my school, and of course you will live rent free; and I should also find you in firing, and pay you fifteen shillings a week as gate-keeper and poultry-woman. The washing will be paid for according to quantity. What do you say?"

Mrs. Dalton seemed unable to say anything for the

moment; but Colonel Raymond understood that her silence was not caused by any lack of grateful appreciation of his kindness, but simply by her emotion, which made her fear to trust her voice. So he said kindly—

"You are not obliged to answer now; indeed, I prefer that you should think the matter over. I will give you till Saturday, but I should like to have your answer then. Tell Miss Spencer your decision, and she will tell me."

That evening, when her little girls were in bed, Mrs. Dalton asked Mrs. Fagan to take charge of her house for an hour, and went to see Miss Spencer. Her mind was quite made up to accept Colonel Raymond's tempting offer, for she was sure of the approval of her clergyman; but she had a longing to talk the matter over, and receive her kind friend's sympathy in her joy.

Miss Spencer was at home, and quite prepared to rejoice with the widow, and promised to give her answer of acceptance to Colonel Raymond, whom she said she should see the following day.

There was a soft look of happiness in Ida Spencer's face that night which Mrs. Dalton noticed, as she said to herself that her "dear young lady grew more lovely every day." This look she attributed in her own mind to kindly sympathy in her own happiness. The time came when, on thinking over this interview and various other things, she told herself that "she had been as blind as a bat not to see how things were going."

Ida Spencer did rejoice most heartily on Mrs. Dalton's good fortune; but the look on her face was the expression of a joy—hidden in her own breast for the time being—which had come to her that day. With her usual sweet unselfishness, she was not wrapped up in her own joy, but gave hearty sympathy to the widow as she talked on about the happy surprise Colonel Raymond's proposal had been.

"You see, miss, God has given me, in this, one of the greatest desires of my heart. Since my Tom went away to Lilyford, I have so craved to be in the country, that my pale-faced girls might enjoy the fields and woods. But I knew it could not be, so I would not let myself think about it; and now God is giving me my wish."

"You have never mentioned your wish, have you? I do not remember to have heard you speak of it."

"No, never; not even to Tom. All I have done was to ask God to make me content to live on where He had placed me."

"Ah, well, He saw that you were to be trusted with your heart's desire, and so is going to give it to you. Oh, Mrs. Dalton, how tender our God is with us! Nothing that concerns one of us is beneath His notice. It does seem so wonderful."

As Mrs. Dalton was about to leave, she said to Miss Spencer—

"Do you remember, when I first knew you, pointing out to me the passage in the Bible (Mal. iii. 10) in which it says that windows in heaven shall be opened to pour out a blessing upon those who fear God?"

"Oh yes; I often think of that time. I was so grieved because I could not persuade you to trust the Lord."

"You see, miss, *we never trust those we don't know* And I didn't know God at that time. When He really showed Himself to me all was different. Since then I have proved Him time after time, and He has never failed me. He has indeed poured upon me and mine such blessings that there is not room to receive them."

CHAPTER XVII.

A DELIGHTFUL SURPRISE.

"God leads us on by paths we do not know,
And well He leads us, though our steps be slow,
Though oftentimes we falter by the way,
Though storms and darkness oft obscure the day.
But when the clouds are gone,
We know He leads us on."

ANON.

THERE was great lamentation in the court in which Mrs. Dalton dwelt when it became known that she was going away; but none grudged her what they called her "good luck." It was at the beginning of March that she took up her abode at Lilyford, in the pretty Gothic lodge of grey stone, over which climbed roses, jessamine, and a Virginian creeper. It would be almost impossible to overrate the delight of the four little girls in their new home; for, of course, Mary left her kind mistress, to accompany her mother into the country. To the widow herself the country breezes were like new life. By

the time haymaking began she had become quite a comely, healthy-looking woman, and no one would have recognized the pale, delicate little girls who left London, in the plump, rosy-faced maidens who ran so joyously about the woods and lanes of Lilyford.

But no joy can be perfect in this world, and the alloy in Mrs. Dalton's cup of bliss was the separation from her friend Miss Spencer. Of course, as a mother, she had felt parting with Charlie; but it is in the course of events that families should be scattered, and she knew that her boy was happy and well cared for. As regarded Miss Spencer, the widow felt that she should never cease to miss her kindly sympathy and helpful advice.

As the summer passed on a feeling of excitement prevailed in Lilyford, for it had become known that "the squire"—as Colonel Raymond was generally called—was about to bring home a new wife. As will readily be understood, no little anxiety was felt as to the style of lady the bride would prove, although it was generally agreed that the squire would be sure to make a good choice. When the expected lady was talked of in Mrs. Dalton's presence, she would think how unlikely it was that any other lady could equal her beloved Miss Spencer in excellence, although she hoped to find in the bride a friend who would second Colonel Raymond's uniform kindness to her.

The excitement reached its height one lovely day towards the end of August, on the evening of which Colonel Raymond with his new wife and Miss Daisy

were expected to reach home. The wedding had taken place in London four days before, and it was generally understood that the speedy home-coming had been decided upon in accordance with the bride's special wish.

Mrs. Dalton heard all about it from the housekeeper at Lilyford Manor, with whom she was on friendly terms, and who, on giving the information, had remarked—

"I think Mrs. Raymond must be a very sweet lady not to take the squire away on a long tour"—which she pronounced *tower*—"away from his little daughter, most would a done it; and it makes me hope that the dear little lady will find a real mother in her papa's wife."

"Do you know who the lady is, Mrs. Mann?"

"No, Mrs. Dalton, I've not heard her name; but I've seen a picture of her in the master's study, and if she is like that she is quite young, very sweet-looking, and very pretty indeed. However, we shall soon see what she is like."

This conversation had taken place on the wedding-day, when Mrs. Dalton was drinking tea with Mrs. Mann, who had invited her to come and see the rooms prepared for the bride.

The travellers were expected to arrive about six o'clock, and long before that hour the road along which they would come was thronged with eager spectators, all anxious to catch a glimpse of the bride, and to be among the first to welcome her and the squire. Judging from the appearance of the

road, there might have been a shower of boys of various sizes, who, after the manner of their species, were enjoying themselves by getting into every possible danger.

Mrs. Dalton stood just outside her door, ready to throw open the gates as soon as the carriage was said to be in sight, and her little girls were playing near her. Suddenly a shout was raised by a boy who had climbed into a tree, "Here they come!" and the expectant throng quivered with excitement as the sound of wheels and the trampling of horses' feet came on the breeze. Another minute and the carriage came in sight, drawn by four grey horses. By the squire sat a young lady, whose face beamed with smiles as she bowed right and left in acknowledgment of the hearty cheers which resounded on all sides.

"Oh my! ain't she a beauty just!" quoth one man to his own pretty young wife, who, baby in arms, stood beside him.

"She's lovely; and how good she looks!" answered the wife enthusiastically. "But ain't she young?"

Mrs. Dalton looked up eagerly as the carriage turned in at the gates, and met the glance of the bride.

That sweet face, so bright with happiness, was not strange to her. She felt quite bewildered, when a joyful shriek from Tottie, "Dady—it's Dady, mother!" told her that her eyes had not deceived her, and that the squire's new wife and her mistress was her beloved Miss Spencer.

The carriage was stopped for a moment, while Mrs. Raymond, greeting Mrs. Dalton kindly, told her to come to the house the next morning to see her. Then the horses were started again, and the carriage drew up at the front entrance; while Mrs. Dalton turned into her pretty lodge, and entered her little kitchen, where all was bright and clean. Almost unconsciously her eyes wandered to an illuminated text which hung over the mantelpiece, and which had been given to her by Miss Spencer when she left London.

Once more she read the words which were to her fraught with such special meaning, "Prove Me now herewith, saith the Lord of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it." And in thought she retraced the way by which she had been led, and reviewed the many mercies with which her lot was crowned; while, with a heart glowing with thankful love, she murmured—

"Thy mercies, Lord, how numberless, how great Thy love has been,
Although my base ingratitude Thine eye has often seen:
How many times from Thy dear side my feet have gone astray,
And yet from my petitions Thou hast never turned away."

"Oh, how great is Thy goodness, which Thou hast laid up for them that fear Thee; which Thou hast wrought for them that trust in Thee before the sons of men."

CHAPTER XVIII.

"NOT ONE GOOD THING HATH FAILED."

"E'en down to old age all My people shall prove
My sovereign, eternal, unchangeable love;
And when hoary hairs shall their temples adorn,
Like lambs they shall still in My bosom be borne.

"The soul that on Jesus hath leaned for repose
I will not, I will not desert to its foes;
That soul, though all hell should endeavour to shake,
I'll never, no never, no never forsake."

ANON.

MANY years have passed away since the events recorded in the last chapter, that they who were introduced to the reader as lads and children, are, when we again meet them, middle-aged men and women.

With Mrs. Dalton's removal from London to Lilyford her trials seemed to cease, and she lived a calm, peaceful life, only chequered by such changes as come to us all, to remind us that "here

we have no abiding city, but seek one to come." But for these changes we should make our nest upon earth, forgetting that "we are but strangers and sojourners."

The widow had learnt many a precious lesson in the school of sorrow, for God Himself had been her Teacher; and when, in His good Providence, she was placed in calm, quiet waters, He was her Teacher still. A sweet sense of God's abiding presence with her and His fatherly care over her so filled her heart with peace, that her content was reflected upon her face, which told of a mind at rest.

The years during which her children grew up to man and womanhood, passed away quietly and uneventfully, but very happily. As she had been in her old home, so at Lilyford, she was always ready to give a helping hand to those around her; and she worked in the village, under Mrs. Raymond's direction, in her leisure time.

Tom did well under Mr. Batt's training, and grew up to be a man in whom the heart of a Christian mother can rejoice. When properly qualified, a situation as schoolmaster was found for him in an adjoining village by Colonel Raymond; and when, in course of time, Mr. Batt resigned his post at Lilyford, it was refilled by Tom, who had married his old master's eldest daughter. When we again resume our acquaintance with Tom Dalton he is the father of a very promising family, who are fast growing out of childhood.

Ned is "safe in port," and has been for many a year. He died of rapid consumption, when only eighteen, in the harbour of Bombay, where the ship to which he belonged was anchored. After his death his mother received letters from one of the officers, as well as from some of his comrades, which were so expressed as to cause tears of joy to flow from her eyes, as she thanked God for the grace given unto the boy over whom, in days past, she had wept in agony of soul, and who, with his dying breath, had testified that his feet were firmly fixed upon the Rock of Ages.

Charlie is still in the employ of Marryat Brothers. He rose step by step from being office-boy to his present position of head-clerk. He draws a good salary, and is highly esteemed by his employers as a faithful servant. He married, young, a good girl who, even by his mother, was considered worthy of his choice—and mothers are hard to please as regards their sons' wives. "Granny," as he still calls Mrs. Biggs, lives with him in his comfortable home at Hackney. For her the easiest chair in the warmest corner is always reserved by common consent, and the boys and girls—of whom there are a goodly party—love her heartily, and tyrannize affectionately over her, as is the fashion of children with beloved grandparents. Indeed, they consider her quite as much their property as is their own grandmother at Lilyford, a visit to whom in summer-time is an annual and much-valued treat to the London-born boys and girls.

When we again see Mrs. Dalton she is surrounded by those of her children who are still on earth. Her little Mary is among her store in Paradise. She, like her father and her brother Ned, fell, when very young, a victim to that fell scourge of our land, consumption.

The other girls, as they grew up, were taken in turns into the Manor House, to be trained for domestic service, under Mrs. Raymond's superintendence. Annie still lives there as the trusted friend and attendant of the mistress. Tottie lives with Miss Daisy—now Mrs. Montagu—as nurse to her children, with whom she is now visiting at Lilyford Manor. Jessie married the gardener, and lives at the lodge, her mother living with her.

They are gathered round their mother's bedside on a lovely summer's evening. Mrs. Raymond—the expression of whose face is even sweeter than when she was a girl, though the once bright hair is very grey, and is smoothed back under a widow's cap—is also present, for the aged saint is close by the brink of that river which she must cross ere she can "enter through the gates into the city," and "see the King in His beauty." The blessed hope of seeing her Saviour face to face has sustained her through months of weary pain and sickness. And now she has almost done with earth, its sins and sorrows. She is quite ready, for she knows that her garments are clean and white, washed in the blood of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world, and calmly and peacefully she waits for the opening of the golden gates.

Occasionally during the last few hours she has spoken in broken, feeble accents of the goodness and mercy which have followed her, and has testified to the faithfulness of her covenant-keeping God. Her last words were, "Not one thing hath failed of all the good things which the Lord our God spake; all are come to pass."

When speech fails she lies still, just waiting. There is no painful struggle, all is peace; and gently, as a weary child falls asleep on its mother's bosom, this aged Christian awaits her summons into the presence of the King.

Through the wide-opened window can be seen the setting sun, casting a glow over the harvest fields, and lighting up the sky with crimson glory. The watchers are very still, though their hearts are heavy with sorrow, for all feel that it would be selfish to disturb that dying bed by outbursts of grief. Quietly they wait while faintly and ever more faintly each breath is drawn.

"And gently enters the Master,
Through the room His garments sweep,
And their trembling hearts beat faster,
And their eyes forget to weep—
Though they can hear Him say,
'Thou shalt be there to-day.'

"As one whom his mother comforts,
He lays the soul on His breast,
But He draweth the curtains closely
As it enters into rest;
And none may see it go
Away through the sunset glow.

"He hath hushed the worn frame sweetly,
He hath soothed the death-alarms,
Till it lieth asleep completely
In the Everlasting Arms;
They know not the soul is gone,
Till the Lord is found alone."

From "One by One," by B. F.

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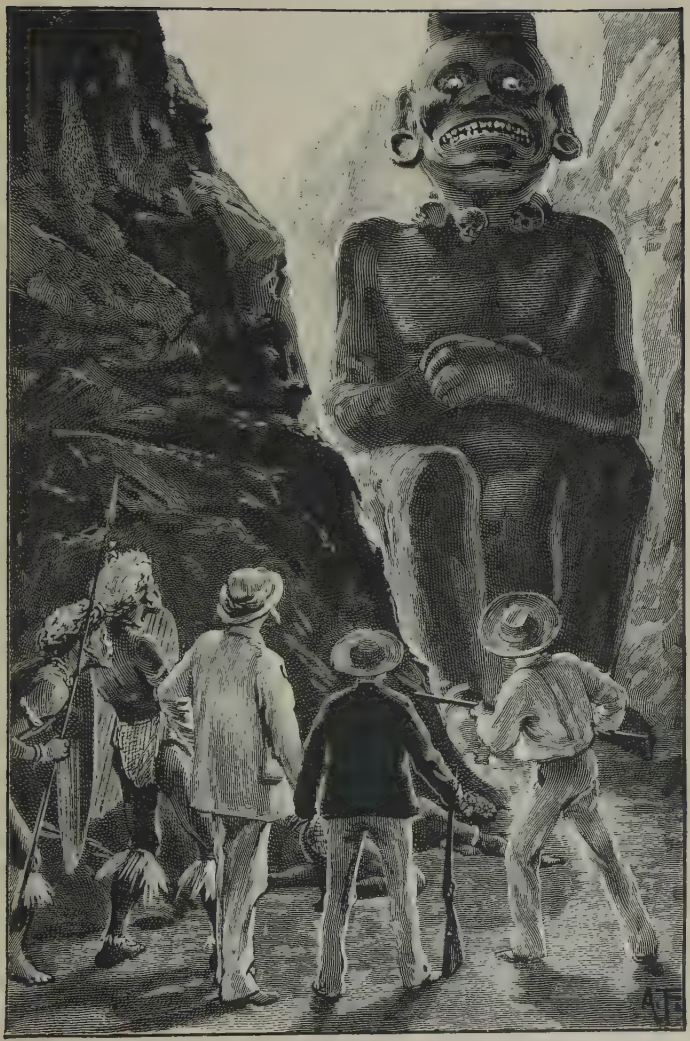

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